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# ECHOES

justice, peace and creation news

## THE CHALLENGE FROM PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

# Echoes From Elsewhere

An Introduction To Echoes Magazine In Reactions, Facts and Issues From All Over The World

## *U.S. Military moves to "Control space" and be "enforcement arm for the global economy" - by Karl Grossman*

The United States is seeking to "control space" and from space "dominate" the Earth below. "Control" and "dominate" are words used repeatedly in U.S. military documents. The U.S. military, further, would like to base weapons in space. As last month's report of the "Space Commission" chaired by incoming Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld puts it: "In the coming period, the U.S. will conduct operations to, from, in and through space in support of its national interests both on the Earth and in space." Star Wars is back. But there's a difference since Star Wars first emerged under Ronald Reagan in 1983. Then it was purportedly needed to fend off what Reagan called the "evil empire," the Soviet Union. There is no Soviet Union any longer. And a key rationale for Star Wars now, U.S. military documents acknowledge, is the global economy of which the U.S. is the engine. The U.S. would, from the "ultimate high ground" of space, "dominate" the planet below in part to keep the global economy on track.

What a legacy to be left for our children and their children at the dawn of this new century, this new millennium, if the U.S. succeeds in trashing the Outer Space Treaty and makes space a new place for war. No one will profit but Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon and TRW, and so on. We have a narrow window to keep space for peace, to strengthen the Outer Space Treaty and ban all weapons in space. We must join with peoples from around the world and stop this move by the United States to turn the heavens into a war zone. Getting and spreading the information about what is going on is critical. We must challenge the anti-environmental, anti-democratic global economy and we must challenge its would-be "enforcement arm" the new U.S. space military establishment.

*Extracted from a Presentation at Technology and Globalization Teach-In, New York City, February 24, 2001. For more information on this subject try the following web sites: http://www.envirovideo.com, http://www.space4peace.org,*

## *Leon Sullivan, a 'prophet' in the fight against apartheid*

**New York (ENI).** Church officials and leading defenders of human rights have praised Leon Sullivan, a leading figure in US efforts to end South Africa's system of apartheid, for his long commitment to making corporations more responsible for ethical conduct. Sullivan, an African American and ordained Baptist minister, died on 25 April of leukaemia at the age of 78 in Scottsdale, in the US state of Arizona. Sullivan was best known for creating the Sullivan Principles, a set of ethical guidelines later signed by officials from more than 125 US corporations working in South Africa. The principles pledged the corporations to practise racial non-discrimination in their South African operations and to opposing apartheid.

## *Churches to meet in Sarajevo to improve relations with Europe's Muslims*

**Geneva (ENI).** Two leading organisations representing mainstream churches across Europe are organising an historic joint gathering on the future of Christian-Muslim relations in Europe. The theme of the meeting, which will take place in Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, from 16 to 21 September, is the "joint responsibility" of Christians and Muslims in Europe in "a pluralist and secular society".

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## *WCC encourages countries to continue working towards the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol despite its rejection by the Bush administration*

"The rejection of the Kyoto Protocol by the Bush administration is a betrayal of their responsibilities as global citizens", said Dr David Hallman, the World Council of Churches (WCC) Climate Change Programme coordinator, today in a first reaction to the decision of the US government to reject an international treaty designed to combat global warming. The United States, with 4% of the world's population, emits 25% of the global emissions that are leading to climate change.

The WCC Central Committee, meeting in Potsdam, 29 January-6 February 2001, reaffirmed its position that "industrialised countries bear the major moral responsibility for precipitating climate change and therefore must exercise leadership that results in real action to reduce the causes".

Hallman, a member of the United Church of Canada, noted that there is increasing evidence that vulnerable peoples, especially in the poorer countries, are already suffering from the impacts of human-induced climate change. He pointed to the past two years of devastating floods in Mozambique, rising sea levels in the Pacific Islands, and persistent years of drought in Africa.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, scientific body which advises the UN, reported earlier this year that "there is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities".

Hallman stated that the climate change issue will continue regardless of the recent rejection: "If the US walks away from the Kyoto Protocol, it just means that another treaty with even more ambitious targets will have to be negotiated in the future as evidence of the devastating impacts of climate change mounts. We encourage all other countries to continue working towards the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol regardless of the US action."

# Editorial

**Echoes**
justice, peace and creation news

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**Publisher:**
The Executive Director of the cluster on "Issues and Themes"
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia

**Publication Staff Team:**
Susie Harrison, Bob Scott, Samuel Kabue, Miriam Reidy-Prost, Thadeo Mutua Mulonzya

**Layout and design:**
Marie Arnaud Snakkers

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**Cover photos:** Paralympic games of 2000 in Sydney, Australia. Lukas Christen (R) and Earle Connor (L) in the final of the men's 200m T42. Photo © Keystone AFP William West

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*All correspondence and inquiries should be directed to:*

**Justice, Peace & Creation Echoes**
World Council of Churches
P.O. Box 2100
1211 Geneva 2 Switzerland

Telephone: 022 - 791 61 11
Telefax: 022 - 791 64 09
E-Mail: sh@wcc-coe.org
Web: www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/echoes.html

## A PATERNALISTIC AND PATRONISING ATTITUDE

*by Samuel Kabue*

People with disabilities have been misunderstood, overlooked and sometimes outrightly discriminated against for too long. To restore their confidence and trust will thus require a very careful approach. Pastors and evangelists will not only need to dig deep into the word of God to understand His will for and promise to them, but also to understand their feelings, aspirations and specific spiritual needs. It is in this respect that we need to understand the effects of the paternalistic and patronising attitude with which the church leaders view people with disabilities and how this, in turn, affects the way they act and behave towards them.

More often than not, church ministers, pastors, evangelists and other church leaders will praise a person with a disability in church, telling others or sometimes the entire congregation how cheerful that particular person is in spite of his or her disability. Rarely is there a reasonable cause for such remarks. What those who make them fail to realise is that they have a deeply negative impact on those who are addressed and the person being referred to. They serve only to magnify the presence of the disability, ignoring the person's other characteristics. This is interpreted to mean that such a person is good, cheerful, etc., but would have been even better if he or she did not have a disability. This is a totally mistaken idea. It ignores the truth about human diversity in terms of characteristics as well as the fact that disability does not mould one into a cheerful person.

These remarks, whether made at church or elsewhere, are embarrassing and people with disabilities usually find some way of avoiding them. They may withdraw or adopt other, more conspicuous, characteristics on which those meeting them could focus instead of their disabilities. Withdrawal at times takes the form of people with disabilities banding together, discussing their experiences and treatment and in the process, guiding each other into activities in which they consider recognition is easier to attain. Quite often such activities will not be church-related.

Attempts to shift focus from disability may take different forms. A friend in a wheelchair recently told me that she finds it very comforting to be accompanied by her dog. Those who meet her usually remark about the lovely dog rather than about her and her disability. She receives compliments for having looked after her dog so well. The dog becomes the subject rather than her. This is a clear indication on how disabled people would prefer to have people focus on something positive about them rather than just their disability. Some of these approaches may not be practical in a church setting and this will mean a choice between them and going to church. In my friend's case, she uses this approach outside the church but still goes to church, where she tries her best to use her musical talent to attract positive attention.

What people with disabilities want is for the pastor to let them be human. They would prefer that he did not focus on a single unique attribute to ensure them a special place. They would be much happier if pastors were to help parishioners to get over their discomfort with people with disabilities and thus prevent their exclusion from the spiritual, social and development life of the church.

Closely related to this problem and equally destructive is the general assumption that people with disabilities all share the same social behaviour, emotional maturity and sometimes even beliefs. Disabilities have very little if anything to do with individual cognitive or affective processes. People with disabilities are therefore very different from each other in the way they think and in personality. There should not be any reason to believe that one disabled person is religious just because you know another one who is religious. In the same way, there is no reason to assume that a disabled person is a Christian because he or she is among a congregation unless there is a personal confession to that effect. This tendency has at times made people with disabilities feel that their disabilities are an acceptable substitute to individual commitment to the faith and thus a concession in the heavenly pilgrimage. The burdens of sin are neither physical nor sensory and cannot therefore, be eliminated or even reduced by physical or sensory disability. There should be no exception when the Lord says "come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I shall give you rest". (Matt. 11:28)

*Samuel Kabue*

# Disabled people and discrimination: A GLOBAL OVERVIEW

BY ELLY MACHA

According to the UN World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, there are about 500 million persons with impairments in the world today. In most countries, at least one person in 10 is disabled by physical, mental or sensory impairment.

Furthermore, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that as many as 80 per cent of all disabled people live in isolated rural areas in the developing countries where medical and other related services are very scarce and where impairments cannot be detected early enough. To a great extent, people with impairments everywhere are confronted with physical, cultural and social barriers, which constrain their lives and limit their opportunities.

The UN Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975) proclaims that all persons with impairments are entitled to all human rights

The UN Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975) proclaims that all persons with impairments are entitled to all human rights including: the right to self-reliance and to "medical, psychological and functional treatment", the right to social security, to having special needs taken into account in social and economic planning, to protection from all forms of exploitation, and the right to be informed of their rights. The consequences of discrimination against, and inadequate provision for disabled people are serious. Disabled people are often subjected to social, cultural and economic barriers which impede their access to health care, education, vocational training and employment.

As we enter the third millennium, concern about the social and political dimensions of disability has intensified considerably. The exclusion of disabled people from the mainstream of economic and social life has been a subject of mounting political protest and mobilisation. Across the world, disabled people are struggling for access to education, employment, housing and transport, for the right to express their sexuality and have children, to participate in political and social life and in the development of their communities. However, the world is a disabling and discriminating place, and millions of us experience this every day of our lives. Although from varying cultural backgrounds and different perspectives, disabled people world-wide have suffered long-term discrimination in many ways, as the brief historical perspective below portrays.

The history of disabled people has been a miserable one. In many societies disabled people were treated as useless creatures cursed by the gods. Many were killed, abandoned to die or condemned to permanent exclusion in asylums. In the Greek society disabled babies were abandoned on desolate hillsides and left to die. Nobody valued their lives. In China disabled children and adults were thrown into rivers.

Europe is said to have greatly tortured disabled people in the past. It is claimed that "New Commodes" targeted arrows at mobility-impaired people. In some instances the extermination of disabled people was carefully arranged and enforced by legislation. Spartans killed disabled people as a matter of law. The church also participated in this destructive mission. Martin Luther for example, ordered the killing of disabled children in the belief that they were incarnations of the devil. English Eugenicists eliminated disabled people under the influence of Darwinian evolution theories about the survival of the fittest.

Germany's Nazi euthanasia programme under Hitler exterminated disabled people. They were judged to be making no contribution to the development of society but rather as a burden on society. Girls with intellectual impairment were sterilised without their consent; it is estimated that 400,000 people were sterilised against their will during Nazi era.

whether some disabled people remain alive or perish is determined by the wishes of the non-disabled members of the community.

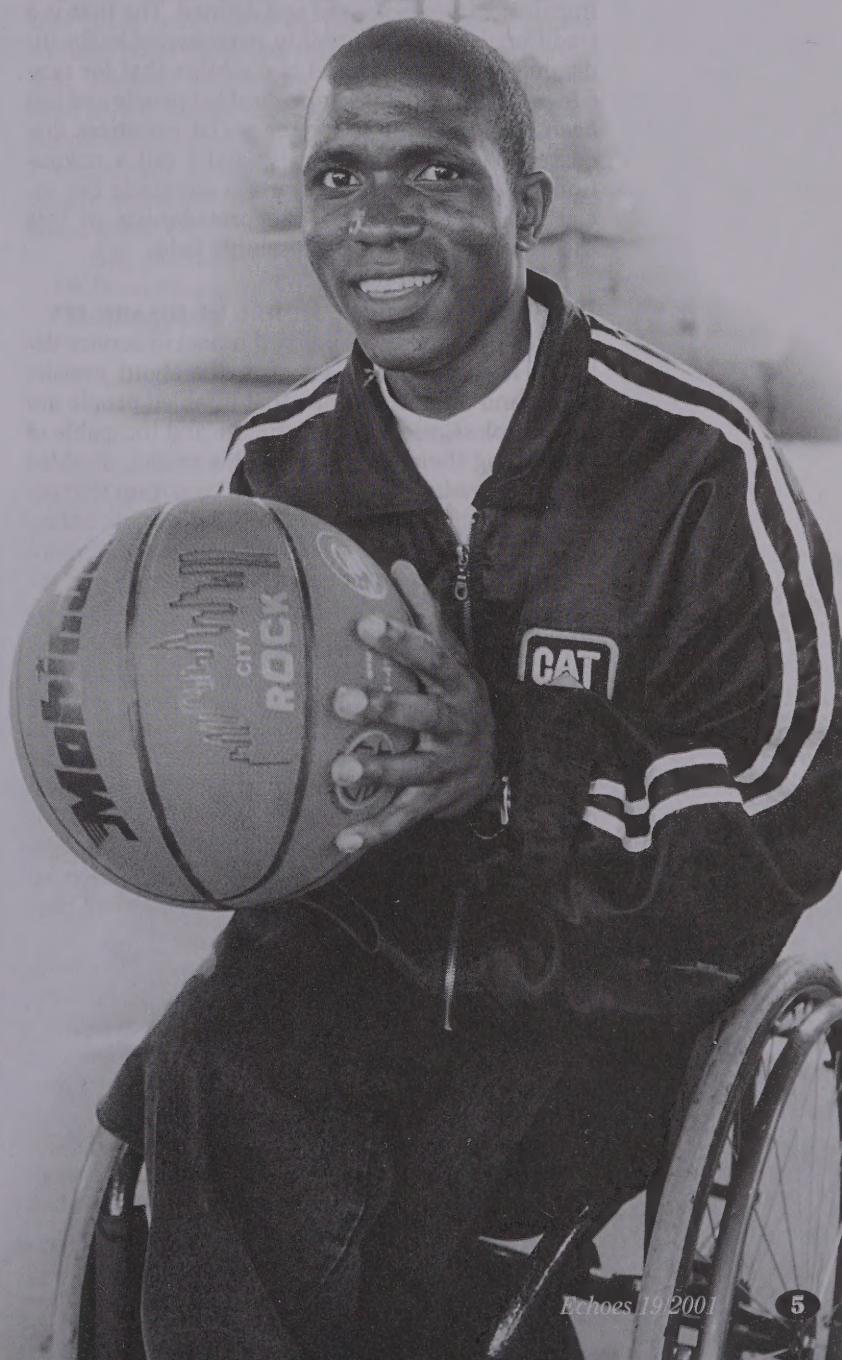
There are people today who, like the nineteenth-century Eugenicists, are strongly in favour of non-treatment of new-borns with severe impairments. This is to say that whether some disabled people remain alive or perish is determined by the wishes of the non-disabled members of the community.

In Africa some parents/guardians of disabled people were afraid of being laughed at and isolated by the society. Hence they often kept them indoors and made no efforts to develop them for their future lives. In some traditions it was believed that such people were a curse from the gods upon society and deliberate action was taken to terminate their lives. Some tribes in Tanzania, for example, killed Albino infants. Where sinful or socially undesirable acts such as witchcraft were suspected, a disabled person and his/her whole family was permanently stigmatised. So superstition and witchcraft practices dominated the interpretation of impairment and the affected individuals were given all kinds of bad names and images.

However, the definitions and experiences of disability vary from society to society. In some African societies, disabled people were perceived as innocent and even holy. Consequently they were overprotected. They were not exposed to challenges that could develop their potentials. Though they were safe from persecution, such overprotection meant they were unable to exercise their freedom and control of their lives.

An analysis of history of disabled people world-wide reveals periods of "invisibility", when they were exterminated, and "visibility", when they were left to survive in the community. By and large, disabled people live in a state of social suspension: neither "sick" nor "well", neither "dead" nor "alive", neither out of society nor wholly in it... As undefined, entities, they exist in partial isolation from society.

The crucial issue to understand here is not that societal responses vary, but why this should be so. Social responses to disability have been determined by two important but interrelated factors, that is, the mode of production and the central value system. The former includes the type of economy, the need for and the type of labour, the amount of surplus it generates and the way it is distributed. The latter relates to social structure, whether hierarchical or egalitarian, how achievement is defined, perceptions of age and sex, relations with neighbouring societies, aesthetic values and many more functionally related factors. The interplay of the two is what produces different responses to disabled people at different times in any given society. Clearly then, social responses to impairment cannot be explained simply with reference to single factors such as the economy or culture.




*Peter Mawindo, member of Zimbabue's national wheelchair basketball team and advisor to the 8th assembly of the WCC*

*©Chris Black / WCC*

Disabled people are confronted by various social injustices in different societies. Are such social injustices here to stay? The answer is: Definitely not! The struggle to end mistreatment has begun. I am referring to the enthusiastic efforts of disabled people and their allies to overcome the difficulties despite imposed cultural and social impediments. The important point to begin with was to identify the 'enemy' and, after much suffering, disabled people and their allies realised that the enemy was stigma.

Stigma is the situation in which society assigns certain negative attributes to individuals or groups. It involves evaluating, making judgements about and reacting to other people. Stigmas mirror culture and society and they are in constant flux. They reflect a view of life, a set of personal and social constructs, a set of social relations and social relationships, a form of social reality. Stigmas emerge through processes of social interaction.

Two contesting theories govern how people with impairment are perceived and defined. The first is a traditional theory of disability, perpetuated by the individual or medical model of disability that for centuries tended to dehumanise disabled people and has been the main source for the social injustices discussed earlier. The second is what I call a revolutionary theory which is discussed alongside the social model of disability. The protagonists of this theory are activists in the disability field.

## Individual/medical model of disability

This has been the dominant model in service delivery. It perpetuates a lot of myths about impairments and disabled people: that disabled people are sick, helpless, useless, unfortunate and incapable of controlling their lives. Within this model, disabled people are reduced to the medical condition that accounts for their physical and/or intellectual characteristics, and little or no account is taken of the social and economic context in which people experience such medical conditions. The model sees disability as an individual tragedy that requires personal adjustment, medical solutions and rehabilitation by professionals. It sees disabled people's problems as being a direct consequence of their impairment. Disabled people are defined as a group of people whose bodies do not work, who look different or act differently, who cannot do productive work. The key elements of this analysis are performing and conforming; both raise the question of normality, because this approach assumes a certain standard from which disabled people deviate.

Who is "normal" and "not normal"? Normality and abnormality is defined by professionals and experts who wish to safeguard the status quo of their expertise. The authority and control they exercise over the lives of disabled people inevitably has a profound impact on the latter.

This approach is used by most agencies that deliver services for disabled people, such as education, health, rehabilitation, and by employers. It involves certain assumptions about impairment, disability and handicap. The interpretation of these three concepts creates myths about disabled people, leading to their exclusion and segregation into an institutionalised life-style.

Based on the medical model of disability, the World Health Organisation (WHO), in 1980, offered the following definitions:

> ***IMPAIRMENT*** *... is any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, anatomical structure or function...*
>
> ***DISABILITY*** *is any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being...*
>
> ***HANDICAP*** *... is a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or a disability that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors) for that individual.*

The above definitions overtly disempower disabled people. I doubt whether disabled people were consulted in their drafting. Despite the fact that it does not experience either impairment, disability or handicap, it was mainly the non-disabled community that produced these definitions. And it was this kind of oppression that eventually produced a sense of dissatisfaction amongst disabled people. Intense oppression eventually plants the seeds for emancipation. There comes a time when the oppressed person stands up and says "Enough is enough". So it was the oppression resulting from the stigma perpetuated by the medical model of disability that gave birth to the emancipation of disabled people in different countries of the world.

One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is that the consciousness of the oppressed person comes to conform with the oppressor's consciousness. Thus the liberation of the oppressed requires self consciousness in order to be able to discard the perceptions of the oppressor and become autonomous and responsible. Any true emancipation of disabled people has to start developing from within. Oppressed individuals must take the initial role of transforming social stigmas into positive perceptions and actions. And it was in response to oppression that disabled people and their allies emerged to challenge the position of the medical model of disability by asserting what I call a revolutionary model, the social model of disability.

## Social model of disability

The social model of disability challenges the stigma attached to disabled people by the way the non-disabled community perceives and defines them. It emerged as a way to view disability in a wider context. Within this model, disability is the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have impairments and thus excludes them from

> To put it very simply, it is not the inability to walk which disables someone but the steps into the building

participation in the mainstream of social activities. Disability refers to social disadvantage created by society's failure to acknowledge and account for the differential needs of people with impairments. The model does not reject the notion of impairment, but situates it squarely within societal perceptions and settings. The term "impairment" is applied to an individual's physical, sensory, intellectual or behavioural condition. The term "handicap" has "oppressive implications ... mainly because of its historical allusion to cap-in-hand begging and charity". In accordance with the social model, all disabled people share a common experience of oppression regardless of their race, sex, ethnicity, age and status. According to this notion, "disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society".

This social model of disability has had a profound influence on our understanding of how society perceives ideas, interprets them, generates knowledge, analyses issues and the way conclusions and solutions are sought. It has opened our eyes to the fact that society imposes restrictions that impede our access to many services. For example, whilst the individual/medical model of disability blames a person for failure to use existing structures such as buildings, literature, communication/information networks, transport etc, the social model criticises the designers, manufacturers and contractors of these structures who at the time of designing, constructing or manufacturing, did not consider disabled people's access. To put it very simply, it is not the inability to walk which disables someone but the steps into the building. Similarly, it is not the inability to speak that creates disability, but the society which fails to communicate with such a person. This way of seeing things opens up opportunities for the eradication of prejudice and discrimination against disabled people. The way to reduce disability is to adjust the social and physical environment to ensure that the needs and rights of people with impairments are met, rather than attempting to change disabled people to fit the existing environment.

## Conclusion

Disabled people and their allies in many parts of the world have developed the social model as an alternative to the medically oriented way of thinking about disability. The social model message is simple. It says that if you want to make a difference to the lives of disabled people, you must change your society and the way it treats people with impairments. This change must begin with full recognition of disabled people's human and civil rights, with the involvement of disabled people themselves in planning and policy-making processes relating to their lives, and with commitment to removing disabling barriers that prevent disabled people's participation in their society. Hence, the slogans "Rights and not charity!" and "Nothing about us without us!"

We have a long way to go before the social model of disability becomes the basis on which policies are made, services are provided and lives are lived. It is also important to make clear that we are not saying that there is no place for medical or other professionals. What the social model of disability means is that existing professions, services and ideologies need to be transformed in ways that promote disabled people's self empowerment and real social change. Professionals should ally themselves with disabled people and their communities in working to attain these goals. •

*Elly Macha from Tanzania is undertaking her Ph.D. on Disability Studies, in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy, at the University of Leeds.*

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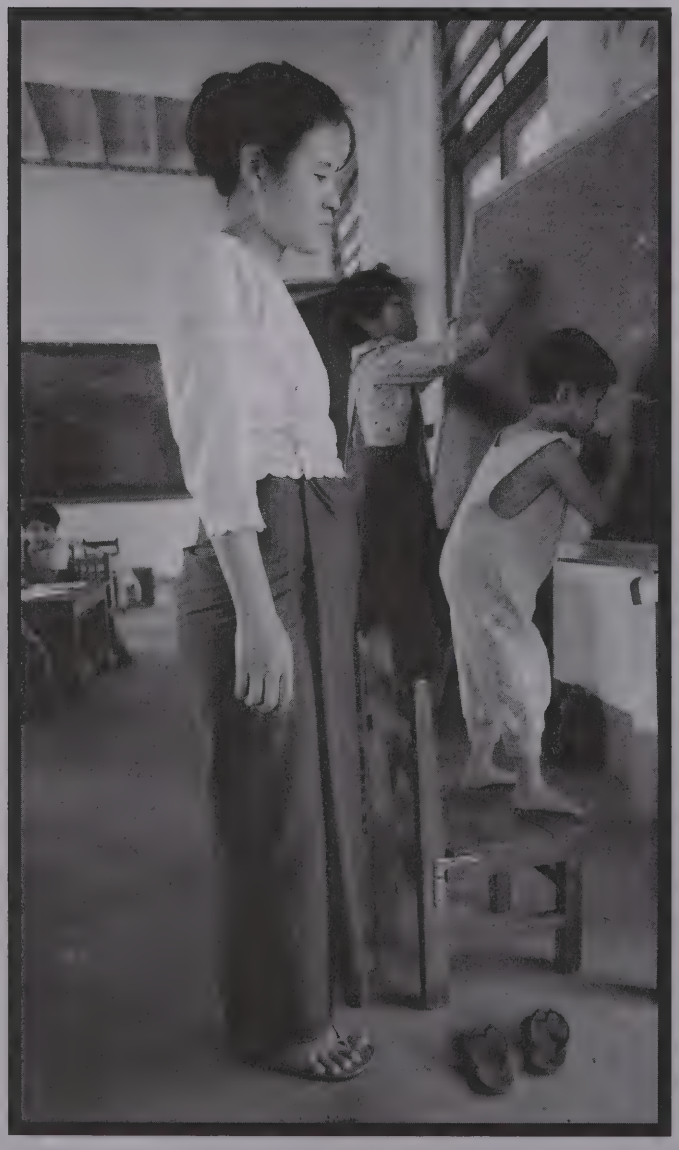
# Walking the Footsteps of the Stranger

**BY PEGGY A. JOHNSON**



*Mary Chapman school for deaf children in Yangoon © Peter Williams / WCC*

A popular Walt Disney cartoon movie *Pocahontas* told a glamourised story of a Native American woman and her interactions with a white explorer, Captain John Smith. Pocahontas sings "You think the only people who are people, are the people who look and think like you, but if you walk the footsteps of a stranger, you'll learn things you never knew you never knew." ("Colors of the Wind") For the past 13 years I have walked with the "strangers" as a hearing person serving an all-Deaf congregation. Indeed I have learned things I never knew I never knew.

> Deaf people are for the most part strangers in their own families

Deaf people are for the most part strangers in their own families. According to statistics printed in *Charisma Magazine's* March 2001 edition (a mission publication of the Assembly of God Church) there are 364 million Deaf people world wide. Most of these people, or at least 90 per cent of them, come from hearing families. The Deaf people of my church tell with sadness stories of growing up in a family that barely communicated with them. Most families did not learn sign language, and if they did, it was only the superficial kinds of signs like: bed, eat, school. Deep discussions about values and life's meaning never happened because there was not enough usable language in the family.

Deaf people from these families are deeply hurt over numerous family gatherings where they were ignored and when they asked what people were talking about or what people were laughing at during a party, they would be told "I will tell you later" or "It is not

important." Times of family crisis are particularly painful as the Deaf one is frequently excluded from plans for funerals and sometimes not even told when a loved one is sick or has died. One of my members read about the death of his brother in the newspaper, and this wasn't the obituary. This was a local paper's story remembering this dead man months later. The deaf man never had an opportunity to attend his own brother's funeral.

Deaf people are strangers out in the world a million times a day as communication in this sound-oriented, spoken-word planet breaks down again and again. Deaf people go to doctors who often won't pay for an interpreter, so they fake it as best they can with a few written notes and lipreading. For years, one of my members communicated with his urologist via lipreading and notes. When he needed to consult his doctor about possible prostate cancer problems, he asked me to get an interpreter. This time he wanted to be really clear about things. I asked the doctor to pay for an interpreter as the Americans with Disability Law requires, and he refused. It costs $75 for an interpreter and he said that was unreasonable. So I personally paid for an interpreter to go on the next visit. When she walked into the doctor's office with the Deaf man, the doctor threw her out. He thought I had hired her at his expense without telling him. I called him back and explained that I had paid for the interpreter. He was not sorry, nor would he pay for the interpreter when the next appointment came around. I paid again and he knew it this time. The results of the cancer test had come in, and the Deaf man walked into the office with the interpreter. The doctor got a piece of paper, wrote NO CANCER on it, and walked out. He would not speak to the Deaf man or answer any of his questions. He was simply not going to let that interpreter do anything. His reasoning: "I have had this patient for a long time and we got along fine, so why all of a sudden do we need an interpreter?" All along it was not fine. The doctor just thought it was.

We would hope and want to believe that the church would be different, better. Sadly, for the most part, it is the same as the world.

A thousand times a day, at the store, at work, at the beauty shop, at the vet, at the car repair place, it is the same story: communication breaks down when a person cannot hear. Some of the misunderstandings have cost Deaf people jobs, promotions, heartbreak. On more than one occasion when the police yelled "halt" and the Deaf person kept walking (because they couldn't hear), they were shot to death.

We would hope and want to believe that the church would be different, better. After all, Jesus says to welcome the stranger and, by doing so, we are welcoming Christ. Sadly, for the most part, it is the same as the world.

I teach religious education classes in an after-school programme at the MD School for the Deaf. The students who attend my classes live in the school dorm during the week and go home on weekends. Only two of the 36 students have any interpreters back home at their churches. The children who have no interpreters say they hate church. It is boring. They have to sit and be good and no one ever talks to them. The hearing kids make fun of them sometimes, and some Deaf students report that their churches try to heal them at special healing services and then when they are not healed they think God has no power. Some are even told they didn't get healed because they needed more faith. When these Deaf students grow up and can decide whether or not they go to church on their own, I doubt if many will ever darken a church door. "God is hearing," one boy told me. "He doesn't understand my signs when I pray."

Add blindness to this mix and Deaf-Blind people find themselves a thousand times more of a stranger than Deaf people. The church I serve ministers to people who are both Deaf and Blind. They are just like any other person intellectually. They just cannot hear or see. One University of Arkansas study gave a figure of 750,000 people in the US today who are Deaf and Blind. The same study states that "The combination of Deafness and Blindness constitutes one of the severest handicaps known to humankind, and a person with this dual disability faces unique problems of communication and mobility that drastically curtail and limit their sources of information and experience. It is severely isolating and leads to great dependence on others and promotes intense isolation and loneliness." (Watson, *A Model Service Delivery System for Deaf-Blind Persons*, University of Arkansas).

> The combination of Deafness and Blindness constitutes one of the severest handicaps known to humankind

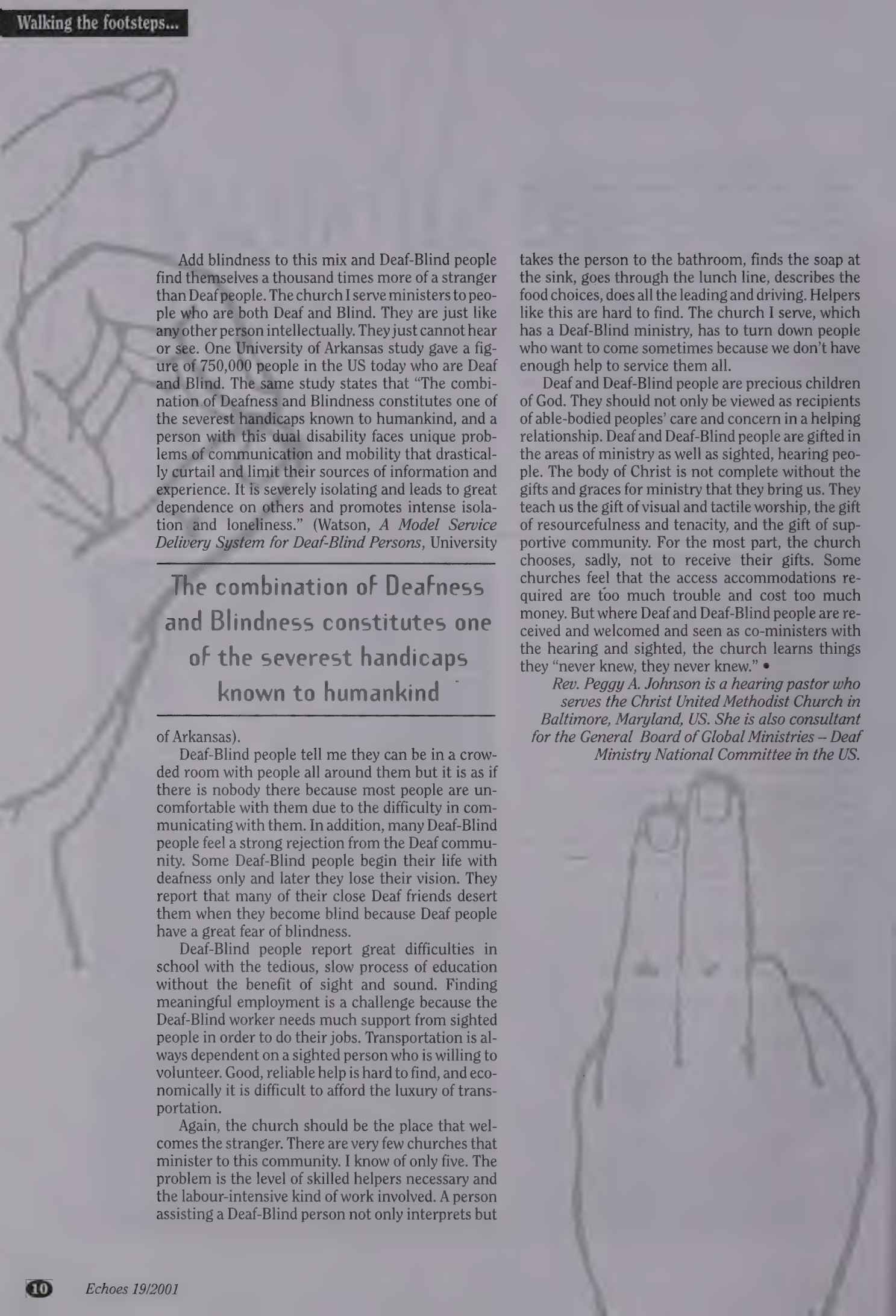
Deaf-Blind people tell me they can be in a crowded room with people all around them but it is as if there is nobody there because most people are uncomfortable with them due to the difficulty in communicating with them. In addition, many Deaf-Blind people feel a strong rejection from the Deaf community. Some Deaf-Blind people begin their life with deafness only and later they lose their vision. They report that many of their close Deaf friends desert them when they become blind because Deaf people have a great fear of blindness.

Deaf-Blind people report great difficulties in school with the tedious, slow process of education without the benefit of sight and sound. Finding meaningful employment is a challenge because the Deaf-Blind worker needs much support from sighted people in order to do their jobs. Transportation is always dependent on a sighted person who is willing to volunteer. Good, reliable help is hard to find, and economically it is difficult to afford the luxury of transportation.

Again, the church should be the place that welcomes the stranger. There are very few churches that minister to this community. I know of only five. The problem is the level of skilled helpers necessary and the labour-intensive kind of work involved. A person assisting a Deaf-Blind person not only interprets but takes the person to the bathroom, finds the soap at the sink, goes through the lunch line, describes the food choices, does all the leading and driving. Helpers like this are hard to find. The church I serve, which has a Deaf-Blind ministry, has to turn down people who want to come sometimes because we don't have enough help to service them all.

Deaf and Deaf-Blind people are precious children of God. They should not only be viewed as recipients of able-bodied peoples' care and concern in a helping relationship. Deaf and Deaf-Blind people are gifted in the areas of ministry as well as sighted, hearing people. The body of Christ is not complete without the gifts and graces for ministry that they bring us. They teach us the gift of visual and tactile worship, the gift of resourcefulness and tenacity, and the gift of supportive community. For the most part, the church chooses, sadly, not to receive their gifts. Some churches feel that the access accommodations required are too much trouble and cost too much money. But where Deaf and Deaf-Blind people are received and welcomed and seen as co-ministers with the hearing and sighted, the church learns things they "never knew, they never knew." •

*Rev. Peggy A. Johnson is a hearing pastor who serves the Christ United Methodist Church in Baltimore, Maryland, US. She is also consultant for the General Board of Global Ministries – Deaf Ministry National Committee in the US.*



# Do you think I'm Stupid?

BY JOHN M. HULL

In order to discover the image of blindness in my own culture I have gathered more than 750 cases of the use of the word "blind" from the pages of one of the leading British daily newspapers. I chose the *Guardian* because it is a high quality newspaper with a particular interest in education and social justice.

The references fell into two categories. The first of these consisted of references to literal blindness, and most of them were of this kind.

## Literal Blindness

Here are some examples of references to literal blindness. "..he had been blind since birth." "...some totally blind people can tell the difference". "...changes in treatment of the blind". "...protecting the interests of blind people". "... a school for the blind in Sheffield." "...the Royal National Institute for the Blind".

These are perfectly straightforward, factual references and are of no particular interest. I only mention them in order to contrast them clearly with the second group. This contains the rest of the collection, rather less than half, and consists of metaphorical references. I should mention at this point that the examples were collected by the computer and are a complete set of all the references to the word which the computer found in the *Guardian* at the time.

## Metaphorical Blindness

The remarkable thing about the references to metaphorical blindness is that they are almost all negative.

The most common metaphorical use of the word blind is to refer to ignorance. "...blind date", when you do not know whom you will be meeting. "...We tasted blind, with no further seasoning", which means that we did not know what we were tasting. "...Mr. A must have been blind and deaf not to have known about", where one is ignorant of the facts. "...who closes his eyes to the past is blind to the present", which means he does not know about the present.

Sometimes the reference is to stubborn ignorance, deliberately persisting in not knowing. "...brightly intelligent and stubbornly blind to the notion that the world might...". Sometimes reference is made to careless ignorance: "...Nor should they be blind to the fact that...". "...But my well-founded optimism doesn't blind me to potential problems". In English, as in many languages, to see is to know, and sometimes ignorance is referred to as being the opposite of metaphorical seeing: "...One would have to be blind not to see that Nato...".

## Blindness as Indifference

To emphasise the alleged ignorance of blind people is bad enough, but more disturbing are the many occasions when blindness is used as a metaphor for sheer indifference. They "...judged its (the government's) policy to be blind to conservation...". "...you always felt he wasn't taking a blind bit of notice of what you were...". "...the minister appears blind to the powerful morality which...".

Stronger expressions suggest that the indifference is wilful and even culpable. He had "a ferocious kind of tunnel vision, blind to everything but impending fame." He was "upbraiding the greed, waste and blind short-termism of the government."

A common cliché which expresses the concept of deliberate indifference has its origin in the famous story about the English naval hero Lord Nelson, who was blind in one eye. When his more cautious superior officer commanded the fleet not to attack the enemy, Nelson is said to have put the telescope to his blind eye, remarked that he could not see any orders and attacked successfully. So we have "Whitehall turned a blind eye for more than a year to plans..." and the "internal affairs bureau had turned a blind eye to rampant perjury and evidence...".

## Blindness as Insensitivity

Because blind people are often unable to respond quickly to passing events or the emotions on the faces of people, the public regards us as being insensitive.

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"You would need to be deaf, dumb and blind not to be disturbed by it". The government department was accused of "a blind and insensitive form of planning".

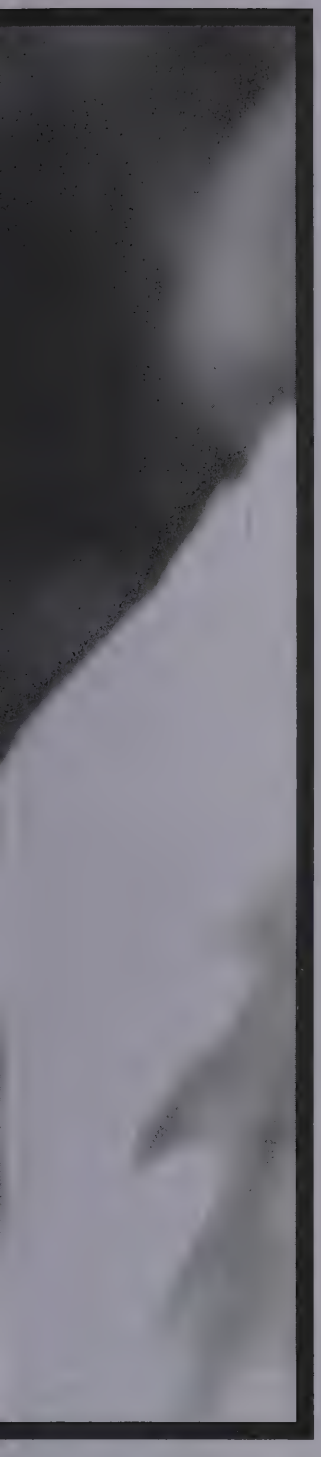
### Blindness as Uncritical

It is assumed that blind people lack knowledge and are insensitive to detail. We are often regarded as lacking in critical intelligence. The most frequent example is the cliché "blind faith". So people speak of the "blind faith placed in the chairman" and "the problem with politicians who have a blind faith in their own visions".

In the same vein, a fanatical movement might "return us to the comforts and blind loyalties of organised religion" and on the other hand, one might be uncritical in one's admiration for something: "exposing his blind appreciation of the very case".

### Blindness as Undiscriminating

Because it is thought that blind people are unable to select or to plan for the future, blindness becomes a suitable metaphor for nature as a whole or for the forces of destiny and chance. There are many references in our collection to blind fortune, blind destiny, and blind fate. Nature, or the God of nature, is described as a blind watchmaker. Another similar cliché is "blind rage", which means that the angry person no longer discriminates between various objects of his fury.



## Violent blindness

The most negative imagery about blindness suggests that blind people are violent. So "the management swears blind that it has no big deals" and the "reaction which makes someone blind with rage." Moreover, he "went charging in blind, fists up". Sometimes the metaphor of blindness suggests a complete collapse of self-control: I was "in a blind sweaty panic clutching my brow" and sometimes "blind" becomes a mere term of abuse, presumably because it is a one syllable word commencing with "b". He "had the blind blithering arrogance to try".

## Discussion

Not all the metaphorical uses of blindness are negative. Our sources also speak of love as being blind, which means that love is deep and enduring, unaffected by superficial changes. We also speak of justice as being blind, which means that justice is strictly rational, paying attention only to the evidence and not distracted by appearances. However, these positive examples are the exception rather than the rule. There is no doubt the English language is riddled with expressions which indicate a negative attitude towards blindness. The fact that many of these are in the form of cliches illustrates the deeply ingrained character of these assumptions.

The extraordinary thing is that although as our culture has matured we have learned not to use the weaknesses and ills of our fellow human beings as terms of abuse, we seem not to have learned this lesson with respect to blindness. We teach our children not to speak of people with learning problems as "idiots" and we no longer refer to psychiatric hospitals as "nut houses" or "luny bins". Yet I hear my highly cultivated medical colleagues speak of conducting a blind trial, and my sophisticated education colleagues as blind marking. In both of these cases, all that is meant is that the experimenter does not know which group has received the new drug or which student has presented the essay. Why continually emphasise the ignorance of blind people?

The negative imagery of blindness in the English language means that everyone growing up in an English-language culture unconsciously absorbs these attitudes. It is this which accounts for much of the patronising and condescending attitudes which are often displayed toward blind people. Moreover, when a sighted person goes blind, he or she internalises the unconscious attitudes, which have hitherto been extended toward blind people. The result is that the newly blinded person suffers a loss of self-esteem and of public esteem, which makes the loss of sight itself more shocking.

There is no doubt the English language is riddled with expressions which indicate a negative attitude towards blindness

## What is to be Done?

All those who use the English language, particularly authors, preachers, journalists and broadcasters, must become more conscious of the long shadows of injustice and oppression which are cast upon us by our linguistic heritage. Whether the source of this injustice be a patriarchal bias, or a racist prejudice, or an unconscious fear of disability, we must all try to renew, not only the face of the earth, but the face of our language. Unfortunately, the biblical and Christian tradition, far from offering us much help, tends actually to encourage and to authorise negative attitudes to disability. That, however, is another story. •

*J. M. Hull is Professor of Religious Education in The University of Birmingham in England. His most recent book* In the Beginning There Was Darkness *(London, SCM Press 2001) discusses the attitudes to blindness in the Bible. His auto-biographical study* On Sight and Insight *(Oxford, One World Books 1997) describes his own experiences of blindness.*

# JESUS DISABLED

**By Rev. Noel O. Fernandez**

*"Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases"*

*(Isaiah 53:4)*

For us Christians the mystery of the incarnation is more than a doctrine; it is the symbol of God's love for human beings, the God who leaves his divine abode to become flesh and blood, part of our daily life, in the person of Jesus Christ. No other religious expression apart from Christianity knows this divine will which extends even to sharing in our day-to-day circumstances, "*rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep*" (Rom 12:15), as the God made flesh was to do. This is the highest proof of God's transcending love, demonstrated in this sharing of human understanding and feeling unique to the Christian God. This is the "*Word who became flesh and lived among us:..*" (Jn 1:14)

What hope and happiness it gives the Christian believer to know that he or she is loved to the full by a God who is capable of *living among us*! A God who, in *making his dwelling place among us*, takes to himself the troubles, wounds, sorrows and disabilities that afflict us. This is a God of love who does not abandon his children alone and defeated, but takes upon himself the difficulties, the pain and disability of others.

Genesis tells us of a God who made man and woman in *his own image* (Gen. 1:27). The image of this God is of the one who takes upon himself the problems of human beings: blind, deaf, physically and mentally handicapped. This is the God who is reflected in every man and woman and who at the same time is *wounded and afflicted* for us (Isa. 53:5). The words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself to his disciples "*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly*" (Jn 10:10) clearly reflect his compassionate, loving, inclusive way of thinking, by which, in spite of sorrows, difficulties and disabilities, he offers life, the possibility of quality and fullness of life, to all creatures. The life which Jesus comes to offer us inevitably entails the sacrifice of his own existence for the benefit of humankind, taking upon himself all our burdens: "*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest*" (Matt. 11:28). The rest he gives us, the life he offers are possible only because, by his supreme action, He took our disabilities upon himself, making himself another disabled person.

According to the mass media, the start of the 21st century finds us in a situation where those sections of the population who are unable to compete or reach the level of efficiency demanded by society are rejected and marginalised. As in the times before the Christian era, they are avoided like the plague, looked on with contempt or, in more contemporary terms, treated as disposable. Among them are a great many people with sensory, motor or mental disabilities.

You will find them of all types, ages and colour in any of the mega-cities of Latin America – Sao Paulo, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Caracas or Bogotá; but you will also find them, enduring still greater suffering and rejection, in the heights of the Andes, the pampas of Argentina, the coasts of Central America and the forests of Amazonia. Men and women with a disability who, instead of living, simply survive between poverty, degrading dependence, preventable diseases, infections, hunger and abuse by the able.

This is a wretched reality in a continent which calls itself Christian and where, according to statistics, a large percentage of the population claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. More than five hundred years after colonisation, the image of the suffering Christ, of the disabled Jesus who took all our disabilities upon himself, is still not a reality in the

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lives of our disabled brothers and sisters. In this new century, the church has to face up to the reality of an image of God that may not be beautiful but which has to be taken into consideration. This image of a disabled Jesus in the situation of those who have not enjoyed the necessary effects of solidarity.

While the church authorities in the continent discuss and try to find concrete ways of tackling the tasks of the 21st century, it is distressing to note that they have not included on their agendas the marginalisation, poverty and suffering of the blind, deaf, physically and mentally handicapped people in Latin America who, as the *image of God*, do not need sympathy or pity but spaces offering understanding and the opportunity for fulfilment and fullness of life where they can develop their vocations, potential and abilities. Jesus, who took our disability upon himself in his death for us on the cross, never ceases in his effort to bring *abundant life* to each and every man and woman. It is sinful that there are those who prevent him from doing so by their immoral and selfish actions and their lack of love.

He bears our pain, insults, afflictions and humiliations; this is what the Prophet Isaiah means when he describes the one who was to be the Word of God Incarnate in our world as making himself blind with the blind, deaf with the deaf, physically handicapped with the physically handicapped....Jesus of Nazareth, human and eternal; loving and compassionate; just and simple; disabled. Speaking as a disabled person, we hope that the efforts made by the churches and Christian individuals in this 21st century to further peace, conservation of the environment, equality of women, the rights of children and care of the elderly will also include on the agenda the struggle for the full self-realisation of people with disabilities.

*"And the king will answer them,'Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me"* (Matt. 25:40).

What then shall we say to our elder brother, Jesus, the disabled person? •

*Rev. Noel Osvaldo Fernández Collot is a Baptist Pastor of the churches "Enmanuel" of Ciego de Ávila, and "La Vida Verdadera" in Corojo, Ciego de Ávila, Cuba.*

*He is director of the Ministry with Differently Abled Persons of the National Council of Churches in Cuba and EDAN coordinator for the Latin American region.*

# JESÚS DISCAPACITADO

**Rev. Noel O. Fernández**

*Y sin embargo Él estaba cargado con nuestros sufrimientos, estaba soportando nuestros propios dolores.*

*(Isaías 53,4ª VP)*

El misterio de la Encarnación es para nosotros los cristianos, más que una doctrina, un símbolo del amor de Dios por el ser humano. Es ese Dios que deja su *habitat* de Dios para, en la persona de Jesucristo, hacerse carne, sangre, cotidianeidad. No existe, en expresión religiosa alguna, aparte del cristianismo, una voluntad divina tal que llegue a la circunstancia de *reír con los que ríen y llorar con los que lloran* (Romanos 12,15), como lo hiciera el Dios hecho carne. Es esta la máxima fundamentación del trascendente amor de Dios, que demuestra esa humanización de comprensión y sensibilidad única en el Dios de los cristianos. Es *Aquel Verbo que fue hecho carne, y habitó entre nosotros...* (Juan 1,14 RV).

Cuánta esperanza y felicidad proporciona al creyente cristiano el saberse amado en la plenitud de un Dios capaz de *habitar entre nosotros y nosotras*. Un Dios que al *poner su morada entre nosotros y nosotras* se adjudica las dolencias, heridas, quebrantos y discapacidades que nos afligen. Es un Dios de amor que no deja abandonados, solos y derrotados a sus hijos e hijas, sino que asume en sí mismo la dificultad, el dolor y la discapacidad del otro.

Por el Génesis conocemos a un Dios que hizo al hombre y a la mujer a *su imagen* (Génesis 1,27). Es la imagen de ese Dios la que carga sobre sí la problemática del ser humano: ciego, sordo, limitado físico y mental. Es el Dios que se refleja en todo hombre y toda mujer, y que a la vez se apropia de nuestras *heridas y quebrantos* (Isaías 53,5). Cuando el propio Señor Jesucristo dijo a sus discípulos, *yo he venido para que tengan vida y la tengan en abundancia* (Juan 10,10) estaba muy bien reflejado su pensamiento comprensivo, amoroso, abarcativo e inclusivo, en el cual, a pesar de dolencias, dificultades y discapacidades, proponía una realidad de vida, de calidad de vida, de plenitud de vida, posible para toda criatura. La vida que Jesús viene a ofrecer pasa inevitablemente por la entrega de su propia existencia en beneficio de la humanidad, asumiendo sobre sí las cargas: *Vengan a mí todos ustedes que están cansados de sus trabajos y cargas, y yo los haré descansar* (Mateo 11,28 VP). El descanso propuesto, la vida ofrecida, es posible únicamente porque Él, con su esfuerzo magno cargó con nuestras discapacidades, haciéndose Él mismo un discapacitado más.

El inicio del SIGLO XXI nos trae, según los medios de comunicación, una situación de abandono, rechazo y marginalidad para los sectores de la población que, al no poder competir o alcanzar los niveles que la sociedad exige para la competencia, son, como antes de la Era Cristiana, apestados, despreciados, o, en términos más contemporáneos, desechables. Entre estos, en un gran número, se encuentran las personas con discapacidades sensoriales, motoras y mentales.

Puede usted hallarlos de todo tipo, edad y color en cualquiera de las *metrópolis* de América Latina: Sao Paulo, Ciudad México, Buenos Aires, Caracas o Bogotá; pero también, y todavía con más agonía y rechazo, entre las alturas de los Andes, la Pampa Argentina, la costa atlántica de Centroamérica o las selvas amazónicas. Hombres y mujeres portadores de discapacidad, que en vez de vivir malviven entre la indigencia, el parasitismo, las enfermedades prevenibles, las infecciones, el hambre y el abuso de los *capacitados*.

Es una realidad lacerante en un continente que se autotitula cristiano y donde según las estadísticas, el mayor por ciento de la población se confiesa seguidora de Jesucristo. A más de quinientos años de la colonización, la imagen del Cristo sufriente, del Jesús discapacitado que cargó sobre sí nuestra discapacidad, no ha sido encontrada en la realidad de nuestros hermanos y hermanas con discapacidades. En este nuevo siglo, ha de tocarle a la Iglesia enfrentarse con la realidad de una imagen de Dios nada hermosa, pero que debe ser tomada en consideración. Esa imagen de Jesús discapacitado en la realidad de aquellos que no han encontrado el efecto necesario de la solidaridad.

Mientras que los poderes eclesiásticos continentales discuten y trabajan en la búsqueda de acciones concretas para enfrentar el siglo XXI, es penoso que no hayan insertado en sus agendas la situación de marginalidad, pobreza y sufrimiento de los ciegos, sordos, limitados físicos y mentales de América Latina, que como *imagen de Dios* no necesitan de compasión, lástima o piedad, sino de espacios de realización, de comprensión y de vida plena para el desarrollo de sus vocaciones, posibilidades y aptitudes. Jesús, quien asume nuestra discapacidad en su muerte vicaria, no ceja en el empeño de hacerle llegar a todos y todas la *vida abundante*. Es pecaminoso que haya quienes lo impiden con sus acciones torpes, egoístas y desprovistas de amor.

Él soporta nuestros dolores, afrentas, quebrantos, humillaciones; este es el sentir del Profeta Isaías al describir a aquel que sería Verbo de Dios Encarnado en nuestras realidades, haciéndose ciego con los ciegos; sordo con los sordos; limitado físico con los limitados físicos... El Jesús de Nazaret humano y eterno; amante y compasivo; justo y sencillo: discapacitado. Aspiramos, hablo como discapacitado, a que los esfuerzos que la Iglesia y los cristianos pretenden hacer en este SIGLO XXI, que se encaminan hacia la paz, la preservación del medio ambiente, la igualdad de la mujer, la reivindicación del niño y la atención al anciano, incorporen también en su agenda de trabajo, la lucha por la plena realización de las personas discapacitadas.

*Y respondiendo el Rey, les dirá: de cierto os digo que en cuanto lo hicisteis a uno de estos mis hermanos más pequeños a mí lo hicisteis* (Mateo 25,40).

¿Qué le diremos pues a nuestro hermano mayor, Jesús el discapacitado? •

*Pastor Bautista de las iglesias "Enmanuel" de Ciego de Ávila, Cuba; y "La Vida Verdadera" en Corojo, Ciego de Ávila, Cuba. Es el director de Pastorales con Personas Diferentemente Capacitadas del Consejo de Iglesias de Cuba y Coordinador para la Región Latinoamericana de EDAN, Red Ecuménica en Defensa de los Discapacitados.*

# PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE BIBLE

## WHO ARE THEY AND WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THEM?

**BY ARNE FRITZON**

The word disability is a modern word and has no direct equivalent in ancient languages. There is no one word, either in Hebrew or Greek that means disabilities in the way we use that word today. In the Bible we read about the blind, the deaf, the paralysed: all the injuries that today we gather under the term disability, but the collective term is lacking. From this absence of the term disability in the Bible can we learn to handle the rubric of this article with care? Disability is a modern term, built on a modern understanding of people with disabilities as a group of people with certain needs due to lack of different physical or mental functions.

The terms disability and handicap relate to politics that we started to use when modern social welfare policies began to take form and the need to name a specific group which demanded special action from the governments was felt. Even though all the conditions that today we name various kinds of disabilities were well known in both the Old and New Testaments, the persons who lived with these conditions were not understood, either by themselves or by others, as persons with disabilities in the modern meaning of that word.

According to the Bible, every human being is created in God's likeness regardless of their physical or mental capacities. The love that God has for every being also applies to people with different kind of disabilities. God's wish to save every human being and the whole creation from evil is a wish he also has for those who live with disabilities. That means that God's command that we love our neighbour as ourselves (Lev 19:18) also includes those who have disabilities. According to the same chapter, God commands his people not to curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind. The Old Testament tells its readers to treat people with disabilities justly and fairly. So Moses tells people that to mislead a blind man on a road will lead to a curse. (Deut 27:18)

There is one well-known scripture passage that from our modern point of view may look discriminating. That is the command in Leviticus 21 that no one who has a blemish may be a priest. We can understand this passage by comparing it to Malachi 1:7 where the prophet complains that the priests are offering polluted food on the altar. The idea is that what is offered to the Lord should not be something that would be thrown away anyway. What is offered to the Lord should be something valuable, so that the one who is offering makes a real sacrifice. Similarly, a family which is asked to offer one son as a priest should not be allowed to offer a son who can not help them on the farm. The son offered for priesthood should be without blemish, like the lamb killed at Easter (Ex 12:5-6). This a rule for the temple cult on earth. But when Ezekiel gives us his prophecy about the future temple, this rule is omitted, and that is not a coincidence. That rule is not needed in the kingdom to come.

Sometimes this passage has been interpreted as if the Bible regards people with disabilities as unworthy and whose injuries or sicknesses are a punishment for sin. We can see this interpretation behind the disciples' questions to Jesus when they meet the man who was blind from birth: (John 9:2) "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus' answer is clear: "It was not that this man sinned or his parents." This answer should have prevented any interpretation that the Bible teaches us that disabilities is a punishment from God for sins. Yet we meet such interpretations among Christians all over the world.

Another passage seems to allow for such an interpretation. It is the story in Luke 5 of the paralysed man who was brought to Jesus. The first thing Jesus says to the man when he meets him is "Man, your sins are forgiven you". (Luke 5:20) But clearly, we can not say that this passage teaches us that there is a general connection between people with disabilities and their personal sins. People have disabilities as a result of not taking care of themselves as they should. Maybe this man's injury was due to an accident he

could have avoided if he had been more careful. Maybe what the man most needed was to hear that his sins were forgiven, and not to be healed from his injury.

That interpretation is important for many people with disabilities because they question the passages where Jesus heals persons with different kind of disabilities. They ask if Jesus' only interest in persons with disabilities is to heal them. Is the Bible only a book about miraculous recoveries whereas **our** experiences – the experiences of those whose lives are not success stories are excluded?

But this interpretation excludes the very centre of Christian faith: the cross and the message of atonement. The gospel is a message of a power that is made perfect in weakness. (2 Cor 12:9) It is about Jesus who was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. Our vocation as Christians is to be weak in Him in order to live with Him by God's power. (2 Cor 13:4) The experience of weaknesses in life is crucial for an understanding of the Christian faith that is in accordance with what the Bible teaches us.

If the power of God is made perfect in weakness, then the experience of weakness is crucial for anyone who wants to experience the power of God. The gifts from people who have experienced different weaknesses are vital for a Christian church. The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. (1 Corinthians 12:22) It is important to note that Paul writes "seem to" and not "are". Because what seems to be weak and what is weak in reality is not always the same thing.

In the Bible we read about God's love and God's transforming power. What is strong and what is weak is not clear from a human point a view when we allow the transforming presence of God influence our way of understanding God. In Deuteronomy 7:7, we read that God did not set His love upon them because they were more in number. The people of Israel were the fewest of all people. Like so many other passages in both Testaments, this one's perspective on weaknesses and strength is very different from the world's perspective.

Maybe the best answer to the question of what we can learn about disabilities in the Bible is to see that the question of who is weak and who is strong is much more complicated in the presence of the living God, and that we need the contribution of all, especially of those who seem to be weak, to understand God's love. Because it is only when all who belong to Christ come together that we can comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love for us in His son, Jesus Christ. •

*Rev. Arne Fritzon from Sweden is a pastor in the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden. He is presently working on a thesis for a Ph.D. in systematic theology at Uppsala University. He is part of the core team of the Ecumenical Disability Network (EDAN).*

*Parable of the blind, 1568, by Pieter the Elder Brueghel - © Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte, Italy / Bridgeman Art Library*

# SEXUAL IDENTITY AND DISABILITY

## BY ARNE FRITZON

My name is Arne Fritzson and I have been asked to write about disability and sexual identity. This is a very delicate subject since it deals with something that is very close to all of us. It is a very personal subject that we tend to approach from our own context, as we do with every other issue. My context is that I am a western, Swedish, ordained, middle-class white heterosexual man in my mid 30s. I lived on my own for many years, though I had a relationship with a woman earlier that broke up. For a little less than two years now, I have been fortunate to be in a new relationship. Both Karin and I are disabled. We both have cerebral palsy. We are both ordained in the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden. Karin is involved in youth work in a local parish and I am a pastor, presently working on a dissertation for a PhD. We are engaged and are right now planning our wedding.

Female, male or disabled? That is a peculiar question, isn't it? It seems almost to be a confusion of paradigms, doesn't it? Disability is not a gender. It is a question of a person's abilities, nothing else. Of course people with disabilities are men and women like everybody else. But maybe the question was not about people's gender or abilities, but categories of public restrooms? For, at least in my country, there are often three categories of public restrooms: female, male and disabled. Some say that that is not how it should be. People with disabilities are women and men like everybody else, so why shouldn't their restrooms be gender-specific, like other restrooms? That seems to be a good and progressive point. But the fact is that people with disabilities sometimes need assistance in restrooms by persons of the opposite sex. So it is much more convenient that their restrooms are not gender-specific.

This example highlights some relevant points. First, it raises the issue of identity and how this is constructed, especially with relation to gender and disability. Second, it raises the question of communication and language. As our thoughts are formed by the language we use, how we name things is important. The third aspect is about assistance in intimate situations and how that forms our understanding of a person's sexuality.

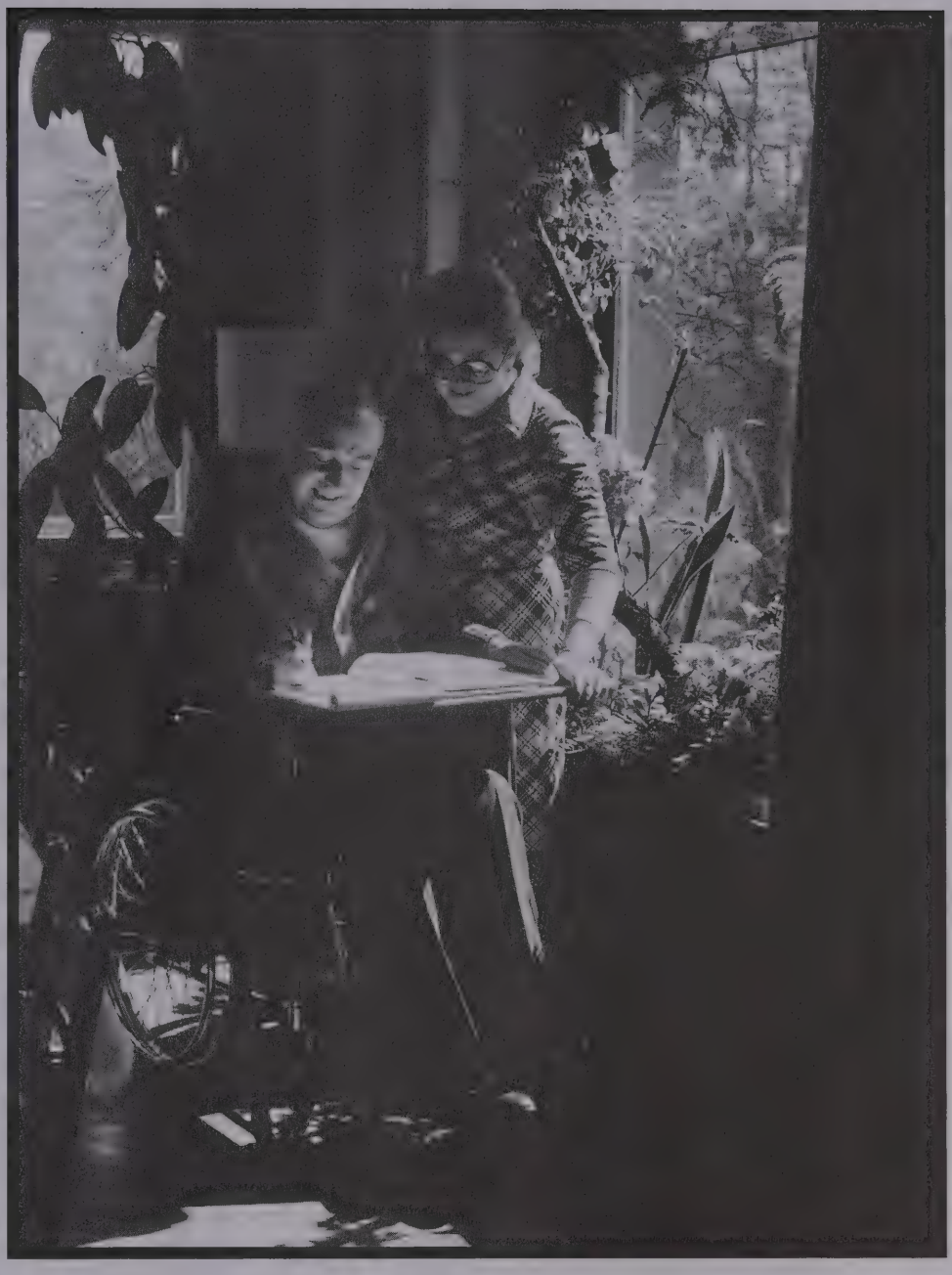
First the question of identity. Often we think of identity as something quite stable. A person has an identity that will remain more or less the same over time unless something dramatic happens. But we can think of identity in much more dynamic terms. Our identity is shaped and reshaped in that constantly ongoing game we call communication. It is in our interaction with our fellow human beings that our identity is constituted. Our identities are vulnerable and can be hurt if our self understanding is unexpectedly challenged. Thus, we put our identities at stake when we communicate.

I believe that this understanding of identity gives us a much better understanding of who we are as human beings. With this understanding, both our sexual identity and our identities as disabled people become harder to pinpoint. We have put the following questions: What do we mean with "sexual identity"? Is there a connection between our sexual identity and disability, and if such a connection exists, which I believe it does, how can we describe that?

It is important to distinguish between "disability" and "handicap" because it helps us to see the difference between factors that **cause** handicaps, which we can alter by changing the environment of people with disabilities, and factors that are part of the person with a disability and that that person actually needs to find a way to cope with. As sexual beings persons with disabilities encounter many factors that cause handicaps. These may be practical problems that are amenable to technical solutions or other people's prejudices about their capacity for living a sexual life, or even their own prejudices. In the field of sexuality, it is important to identify what causes handicaps for people with disabilities, and remove them.

In the field of sexuality, it is important to identify what causes handicaps for people with disabilities, and remove them

But because we are talking about identity, we need to address the more difficult question about the relation between a person's disability and their sexual identity. Our sexuality is very personal and intimate. As biological beings, everything that is connected with the way we multiply touches to ourselves and our way of understanding ourselves. In the first chapter of Genesis, the first thing God said to the human



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beings He had created was "Multiply". That indicates how important sexual identity is for our understanding of what it means to be a human being. I believe that it explains why the topic of human sexuality has stirred up such strong reactions in churches and ecumenical bodies around the world.

Disability issues also highlight our vulnerability as human beings. The topic of sexual identity and disability points to the fact that we as human beings are doubly vulnerable. At some point everyone has felt insecure in relation to their own sexuality and has asked themselves if they will find a partner and if they will be successful in their sexual life. Here, I think we are all the same, regardless of whether we have a disability or not. But if you live with a disability those questions take on a different dimension. If you do not find a partner or if your sexual life sometimes causes you frustration, you always wonder if it has anything to do with the disability.

The possibility of asking that question makes a difference. Anyone who counsels persons with disabilities in this field should be aware of this. Of course, no one knows the answer. But even so, the question evokes feelings in people with disabilities that we must dare face. It is easy to claim that so many others who do not have a disability ask the same kind of questions and that it is not restricted to people with disabilities.

There are two things I think are important when counseling a person with disability who wonders if they will find a partner. The first thing is that life offers no guarantees. No one can be certain that they will live a happy life together with a person they love. As a human being, to live is to find a way to cope with the fact that you are not guaranteed happiness in any area of your life.

The other thing is that your attitude makes a difference. Your chances of finding a partner diminish without hope. To hope, to expect that something can happen, that life can change for the better, is a first step towards realisation. With hope you open up to see possibilities and catch them as they come. Your dream person won't just knock on your door one day wanting to start a relationship with you. If you want to meet someone you need to get out, meet people, take risks. In that process you're likely to get hurt. Most of us do. But if you don't take risks, you probably won't meet someone who is right for you unless you're very lucky.

When someone is attracted to someone else who is not attracted to them, they may blame themselves for not knowing better than to fall in love with someone who is impossible to get. In such cases, it helps to remind them that you don't always choose who

To hope, to expect that something can happen, that life can change for the better, is a first step towards realisation

*Rev. Arne Fritzon*

you are attracted to, and that the ability to become attracted to another person is something good and necessary in order one day to be attracted to someone you actually will start a relationship with.

None of this is restricted to people with disabilities. It applies to anyone who wonders if they will have a partner. But when a person with disability asks if his or her disability will be a problem, we must be honest and say that it can be, and that even if not, it should be taken into consideration. A person who considers starting a relationship with someone with a disability may wonder what that disability will mean for their own every-day life. That disability will in fact also be his or her partner's disability and that creates an inequality between the partners. Because the partner without the disability can choose to live without disability by ending the relationship.

Many persons with disabilities also ask themselves whether they want a partner with, or without, the same kind of disability as they have. To be two persons with disability in a relationship can of course cause practical problems. It can for instance, mean that the couple is more dependent on assistance. On the other hand, there will be an understanding of each other's conditions that can be very helpful. To always have to explain the disability's effects in every-day life can cause problems, at least at the beginning of a relationship.

When a person with a disability enters a relationship, whether with someone who also has a disability or not, the partners have to find out who they become together. How should they organise their life in a way that suits them? How should they share responsibilities for their home? How will they plan their time so as to be able to both do things as a couple and thing on their own? If one or both need assistance, how will they cope with the fact that a third or fourth person will be in their home on a professional basis? In handling all those questions they have to take into account the limitations that the disability imposes on their life as a couple.

Among the aspects of a life together as a couple that they have to explore is how they will be together physically. A lot of disabilities do set limitations for what you can do together as a couple. But the joy of being together is not about being able to try all the different techniques. It is not a matter of athletic achievements. Physical life together is much more about the joy of being close, about tenderness and caring. A couple where one or both partners have a disability might need more time than others to find their way of being together and giving each other joy. In that respect, patience is important. The fact that you don't always succeed the first or every time does not mean that you will always fail to accomplish what you want. Maybe you need to make mistakes in order to understand the way it works for you.

As for most couples where one or both partners has a disability will at some point have to face the question of whether they want a family. To be a parent with a disability can mean that you need to take a lot of special factors into consideration. In fact it raises so many problems that this would warrant a new article of its own. I only want to mention this issue here as it is, of course, an important part of a person's sexual identity to be able to become a parent.

When a person with a disability enters a relationship, whether with someone who also has a disability or not, the partners have to find out who they become together

But again we should return to the question of what makes sexual identity special in relation to disabilities. And we have to accept that there is no easy answer to that question. To give simple answers on such matters is always to make life simpler than it is, to diminish its richness and to disregard its many nuances.

So on this question, our job is not simply to state the facts of life, but rather to seek a calm conversation that respects our differences without giving up our moral values and the vulnerability we all share in this field. This attitude can help us see that our sexual identity, with all the questions and ambiguities it involves, regardless of whether we live with or without a disability, is still a part of the richness of being a human being and a gift from a loving God. •

*Rev. Arne Fritzon from Sweden is a pastor in the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden. He is presently working on a thesis for a Ph.D. in systematic theology at Uppsala University. He is part of the core team of the Ecumenical Disability Network (EDAN).*

# SEXUALITY & DISABILITY

## INTEGRATING THE TWO?

**BY JOHN NAUDÉ**

Everywhere in the world you will find disabled people. No societies are unaffected by disability, yet disabled people as a group still tend to be marginalised, hidden or ignored.

Disability is an issue that I believe many people are afraid to approach because it can affect all of us. No one is "safe" from the possibility that they may become disabled through age, accident or illness. Therefore it is often presumed safer not to deal with the subject.

Disabled people do not "fit in" with the criteria that humankind has created for itself. They receive messages telling them that they are not "quite right", and they can see that disabled foetuses are often terminated. This is not a message that encourages disabled people to feel positive about themselves or their value within society.

These negative messages can have a major impact on a disabled person's sexuality, and expression. This is because most people view themselves in relation to what other people think, and this view is very important in determining whether we feel positive or negative about our sexual identity and expression. So the messages received about being disabled can have enormous repercussions on how disabled people see themselves.

### A QUESTION OF WORTH!

Throughout history (and even nowadays) we can see that disabled people have been hidden in institutions, and not considered to be worthwhile. In Roman times, babies born with a disability were left out on hillsides to die. If they survived, then that would be viewed as God's will.

We may feel times have changed yet in the UK the same principle has been applied to disabled babies over the last 40 years. I know that if I had been born in another hospital, a "professional" would have measured my abilities, and if I had not met his criteria I might have been left to die in a cupboard. I am now a married man, ordained as an Anglican priest, with various achievements that I can look back on with satisfaction.

Most people think of disabled people in a negative light. God, however, views us differently. Knowing we are part of His creation, and that He values us, can change our perceptions of each other and ourselves. In Psalm 139 it says: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (NIV). As a disabled person I know that I am part of God's creation, and I am fearfully and wonderfully made. This challenges the negative messages I have, and continue to receive. The feeling of being valued and worthy encourages disabled people to know that they have something to contribute to society, and helps them feel positive about themselves.

Humankind has created a system that judges "worth" by what we can contribute to the world. God does not. For we are all his creation and all seen as precious in his sight, not based on what we achieve but on who we are.

We all receive messages about our worth in society, and this can affect the way we feel about ourselves. If disabled people are not valued for who they are, then this can have detrimental effects on how they feel about themselves and their participation in society.

This in turn can make it difficult for disabled persons to acknowledge and express their sexuality. We often want to deny the sexuality of disabled people. We see the problems before we see the person's right to express their God-given sexual identity.

We are all bombarded with messages of what is deemed attractive. Most of us know that we can't fulfil those expectations, although we continue to be influenced by them! What is deemed attractive in the media never includes images of disabled people. This continues to tell disabled people that they are unattractive and thus unacceptable.

Those who don't fit these physical criteria can as-

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pire to other forms of attractiveness or appeal, such as sporty-ness or intelligence. In my role as a psychotherapist I find that many disabled people seek acceptance and worth through sport or through intellectual achievement. The former may hope to acquire the image of the conquering hero, overcoming his disability, whilst for those trying to prove their worth through intelligence, the image is of the mind compensating for the disability. Neither of these approaches will satisfy their needs.

It is difficult for the disabled person to satisfy his/her desire to be wanted, valued and to feel of worth. Outside pressures can hinder a disabled person from feeling positive about themselves and physical attributes can contribute to a poor self-image. The question of ownership of the individuals' body is a major factor in not seeing oneself as attractive.

## Whose body is it?

For some disabled people the question of body ownership can restrict their view of themselves as sexual beings.

> it is more likely that the sexual problems disabled people experience are due to negative and stereotyped attitudes in society and the associated feelings of lack of self-esteem.

With continuous help in dressing, undressing, washing and the management of continence, disabled people can begin to switch off from their bodies. As things are done to them rather than **with** them, the bottom half of the body becomes a separate entity, not owned by the individual but by everyone else

who comes to help dress and change. Also mirrors are often waist high, and don't show the full body, which continues to feed this "separateness".

As disabled children grow up they become aware of their sexuality in the same way non-disabled children do, i.e., through television, cinema, gossip, magazines, etc. But their social activity is more closely supervised than that of non-disabled children and sexual expression of behaviour is often discouraged. Their sexual development can become distorted because of the attitudes of the people around them.

The non-disabled child gradually acquires "ownership" and respect for his/her own body. When he/she is small, care of the body is in control of the mother and is handed over as the child grows up. This affects self-identity as a sexual being. If that part of the body is not owned, there is no sense of pleasure, protection or ownership. Private parts are no longer private.

## The risks of abuse

There is a great deal of research showing disabled people as being vulnerable to abuse. Perpetrators have been known to seek out disabled people for abuse, as they believe that no one will listen to the disabled person. There is also a common myth that a person's disability will make them "safe" from abuse. With poor body image, the need for personal care and a large number of individuals coming in to help with care, the risks of abuse are in fact heightened.

There is a great deal of research showing disabled people as being vulnerable to abuse

Perpetrators can also seek out those who are unable to communicate verbally, therefore restricting those who will listen and take action. However, a great deal of work is now being done with disabled people to allow them to "own" their bodies, and also in equipping them to express themselves when some inappropriate behaviour or care has occurred. Those involved in child protection are also being trained to listen to disabled people and acknowledge the high risk of abuse.

## Creating relationships

The desire to be in a relationship is almost universal. The media also convey the message that those who are not in some form of a relationship are sad or weird. We are told that we are incomplete without a husband or wife, girlfriend or boyfriend. Until we meet that criterion we are missing something.

Disabled people receive this message and seek to comply by finding someone. Yet when their opportunities to meet people are restricted through attitude and access, this limits the opportunities considerably. The question of how non-disabled meet people is observed through magazines and television. These programmes generally don't really show the stages involved in building a relationship, particularly those that lead to a sexual relationship. The disabled person may try to imitate those images, and find that they fall short, or make wrong presumptions of what is the next stage in the relationship.

## Sexual expression

Most people at some stage during their life worry about sex and sexuality. Disabled people can often feel that all their problems and insecurities about relationships and sex are a result of their disability itself. This understandable reaction is wrong on two counts. Firstly, it ignores the wider reasons why having a disability can cause poor self-image, as mentioned above. The second is that it assumes that non-disabled people have no emotional or sexual problems.

The reality is that everyone worries that no one will ever love him or her for who they are. These feelings may be harder to overcome for a person with a disability, but recognising them and understanding where they come from can help in dealing with them.

However, parents, carers and teachers still seem very reluctant to openly and honestly discuss sex and sexuality as it applies to disabled people. In order to help understand why this may be the case, it is useful to consider some of the myths about sexuality and disability.

The "problems" relating to sex and relationships for disabled people may be caused more by negative self-image, lack of self-esteem and social pressures than necessarily by physical impairment or loss of function due to disability. Examining the following myths is an attempt to begin to understand some of the wider issues involved.

## Dispelling the myths

Two myths, that

- *all disabled people are asexual i.e., incapable of having sexual relationships, and*
- *disabled people are obsessed with sex and have uncontrollable urges*

contradict each other but come from the same starting point which is that because of their disability, all areas of a disabled persons' life are "abnormal".

Another myth is that

- *disabled people are childlike and need to be protected from being hurt or let down.*

Families, friends, nurses, doctors and carers often encourage dependence. It is increasingly clear that disabled people need services, not protection. The attitude that disabled people need protection is restrictive and forces them to take on a "disabled" role. The fear of treating a disabled person as independent and sexual can reflect a non-disabled person's insecurity.

The following myths relate to seeing "disabled" sexuality as different to "normal" sexuality, and often stem from a lack of knowledge:

- *Disabled people will always give birth to disabled children.*

In fact genetic disabilities occur in only a small number of births.

• *Disabled people should only marry and have sexual relationships with disabled people.*

This attitude limits the possibilities of developing relationships and defines someone as disabled and not as a person.

• *Parents of disabled children do not want their children to have sex education.*

Professionals often use this as an excuse for not discussing sex and sexuality. Whilst some parents (of either disabled or non-disabled children) may in fact be uncomfortable about sex education, this should not be used as a reason to deny people the opportunity to learn and express their feelings and concerns.

• *There must be something wrong with a non-disabled person who has a relationship with a disabled person.*

The non-disabled person may be seen as wonderful, caring, self-sacrificing, or as not capable of having a relationship with a non-disabled person. This myth again reflects a negative attitude towards disability and suggests that a disabled person is less worthy than a non-disabled person.

• *For the disabled person, it is better to have a relationship with a non-disabled person than with another disabled person.*

This myth is commonly believed by disabled people themselves. This is particularly sad as it shows the extent to which negative attitudes affect disabled people's views about themselves. The idea that a non-disabled person can be a status symbol again suggests that disabled people are less worthy.

And finally, these two myths are concerned with sexual function.

• *Disabled people cannot have orgasms.*

In some cases this may be true, and certainly there may be decreased sensation in various parts of the body, although in some cases bodily sensations may even be heightened. This myth reduces sex to one particular moment, and ignores the fact that sex can be satisfying without orgasm and that sexual relationships are about giving and receiving pleasure.

• *Sexual problems must be due to the disability itself.*

While disability may make the actual mechanics of sex more difficult, i.e., finding a comfortable position, it is more likely that the sexual problems disabled people experience are due to negative and stereotyped attitudes in society and the associated feelings of lack of self-esteem.

A willingness to take emotional risks and experiment is crucial to the ability to make and maintain relationships. It is important that both disabled and non-disabled people talk about these myths and their feelings if the question of sex and sexuality is not to be ignored and, consequently, to become a problem.

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**many disabled people seek acceptance and worth through sport or through intellectual achievement.**

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As part of God's creation disabled people are sexual beings and must have the opportunity to express their sexuality. Knowing that disabled people are part of God's creation and are fearfully and **wonderfully** made, as are all people, can encourage them to express themselves and discover their beauty as part of God's creation. By silencing the negative and destructive messages that disabled people receive they can be equipped to begin to reach their full potential and participation within society. And society will be better for it. •

*Rev John Naudé, from the UK is Chairperson of Church Action on Disability (CHAD)*

ANY DISABLED
PEOPLE SEEK
ACCEPTANCE
SEEK OR THROUGH
INTELLECTUAL
ACHIEVEMENT

# The roots of prejudice

BY JENNIFER KERN

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Sexuality evokes our deepest human needs and desires in uncountable ways.

We disabled people are capable of close personal relationships and fulfilling sexual experiences, but receive a series of confusing societal messages. These messages, with very little exception, perpetuate myths and stereotypes of disabled people that serve to diminish our full humanity, and therefore, *everyone's* full humanity. Commons myths of people with disabilities portray us as inferior to non-disabled people, asexual, childlike, weak, passive, not good partners or parents, in need of sterilisation.

The roots of prejudice against people with disabilities are deep. Fear of people with disabilities, whose bodies and minds challenge the stereotype of "normalcy," evoke deep psychic discomfort in people unfamiliar with disability. There is a tendency among the non-disabled, whether through kindness or bigotry, to react to people with disabilities as "other". This reinforces "able-ism" both in spite of and because of the fact that anyone can become disabled at any time.

In many industrialised countries, the obsession with independence devalues people with disabilities, who are believed to personify weakness or vulnerability. Materialistic culture is too narrow to embrace the full range of humanity – old/ young, disabled/ non-disabled, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

In many industrialised countries, the obsession with independence devalues people with disabilities, who are believed to personify weakness or vulnerability

Myths and fears about people with disabilities have led to persecution and discrimination for as long as there have been people with disabilities. Similarly, efforts to deny or control people's sexuality also have ancient roots. The same forces that seek to control the wholeness and holiness of our bodies also inevitably deny that people with disabilities are made in God's image, and are good, whole and sexual beings.

## Darwin's idea of the "survival of the fittest" of a species was misapplied to individuals

One version of social control came in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the form of the eugenics movement, which espoused principles of Social Darwinism popular in Western countries. Darwin's idea of the "survival of the fittest" of a **species** was misapplied to individuals, creating a hierarchy in which some people are seen as inherently inferior to others. These theories influenced public policy and health care decisions (and still do), fostering racist and classist ideology and proving highly dangerous for people with disabilities, poor people, and people of colour, all of whom were deemed "inferior beings" by the so-called objective theoreticians.

One specific legacy of eugenic thinking occurred in Nazi Germany, where people with disabilities were the subjects of torturous "experiments".[1] These atrocities, including the forced sterilisation of approximately 400,000 people with disabilities, were committed in the name of a pseudo-science that would kill to prevent our procreating[2]. Although partially outlawed, the populations most affected by such policies, often with parental consent, are girls and women with mental disabilities in institutions.[3]

Current practices of genetic research, and testing of pregnant women to screen for disability, perpetuate eugenic thinking (in the service of pharmaceutical profits), disguised as a benevolent and altruistic search for knowledge and an "end to human suffering". The vast majority of practitioners of genetic research have yet to question the assumption that eliminating disability is a worthy goal. In other words that the world would be better off without people with disabilities.

Another challenging example of the intersection of sexuality and disability is the practice of female circumcision, an ancient but still prevalent practice created to control female sexuality that often causes mental and physical disability.

As Nbtiense Ben Edemikpong, a Nigerian woman writes: "The practice, indeed, has affected African women's view of sex, sexuality and relationships with men. It may be considered as another form of female sexual oppression, which is the manipulation of women's sexuality in order to ensure control, domination and exploitation."[4]

Policies and practices, not to mention schools, sheltered workshops, and other institutions, keep people with disabilities hidden, isolated and segregated from non-disabled people. An insidious effect of this has been to diminish our sense of ourselves as full human beings complete with sexual identities, and to reinforce non-disabled peoples' stereotypes of us as asexual.

As people with disabilities enter the public sphere demanding increased social, economic, and political rights, it is ironic and untenable that the most personal privileges of humanity remain out of reach for so many of us. The right to love our bodies without malignant intervention, to choose a partner without social chastisement, to bear children without succumbing to a medical model that devalues disability enough to screen out any potential "imperfections," are fundamental rights and ought not be denied. It is not a question of special rights, but of the human right to love and be loved fully in the bodies and minds with which we are blessed.

People with disabilities are and will be sexual beings whether or not medical professionals, religious

## schools, sheltered workshops, and other institutions, keep people with disabilities hidden, isolated and segregated from non-disabled people

institutions, or society at large support our full humanity, whether or not they accept our innate sexuality as an instinct and a means for developing life-affirming intimacy. Any bias or institution that inhibits the sexuality of people with disabilities diminishes all of us.

Learning to love and respect oneself and one's body is necessary for ALL beings to develop a healthy sexual self-esteem. To make this possible, we all have a role to play. Fortunately, despite the negative messages we have been fed, all over the world people with disabilities are beginning to emerge and declare: Nothing About Us Without Us! We are a sisterhood and brotherhood of people who deserve to be valued, as we must truly value ourselves. A good place to begin is for all of us, disabled and non-disabled, to examine our own fears about our changing bodies, our sacred sexuality, and people with disabilities in our communities. •

*Jennifer Kern received an A.B. degree from Barnard College in 1988 and a J.D. degree from Hastings College of the Law, San Francisco, in 1994. She practised civil rights law with a focus on police misconduct cases in Oakland, California, 1994-96, and currently consults on international disability rights projects. From 1997 through 1999, Ms. Kern was program director of Whirlwind Women (WW), an international women's wheelchair-building project, and currently serves on its Advisory Committee.*

*After learning metalworking skills and building her own Whirlwind wheelchair, she travelled to Kenya in 1997 to assist with WW's first intensive wheelchair-building course for women with disabilities. In 1998-99, she directed the WW pilot program with disabled women building wheelchairs in Kampala, Uganda. In November 1999, she led a team of volunteer trainers to San Luis Potosí, Mexico, to work with local women with disabilities in an introductory metalwork-training program as preparation for starting a wheelchair-building business. In January 2001 she was in Uzbekistan for leadership training of women with disabilities.*

*Notes:*

*1. p. 119,* Imprinting Our Image *Theresia Degener "Sterile without Consent" Diane Driedger and Susan Grey, eds., Gynergy Books, 1992.*

*2. The T4 program whose purpose was the killing of people with disabilities to remove them from the gene pool resulted in the refinement of the gas chambers then, mechanism of genocide of millions. For more information, see Hugh Gregory Gallagher* By Trust Betrayed. Patients, Physicians, and the License to Kill in the Third Reich.

*3.* Imprinting Our Image *Theresia Degener "Sterile without Consent" Diane Driedger and Susan Grey, eds., Gynergy Books, 1992. p.120*

*4. p. 129* Imprinting Our Image *Nbtiense Ben Edemikpong, Nigeria, "We Shall Not Fold Our Arms and Wait," Diane Driedger and Susan Grey, eds., Gynergy Books, 1992.*

*Ms Peninah Mutinda was trained by the National Council of Churches in Kenya in wheelchair making. She now runs the Handicapped Mobility Appliances Centre on her own*

# Who said having a disability is negative?

BY JOHN NAUDÉ

As a 38-year-old man who uses a wheelchair and is approaching middle age, I find the concept of being not disabled quite intriguing. Many friends and colleagues tell me about the benefits of not being disabled, yet I have never felt the need or the desire to be healed or to become non-disabled.

I appreciate that some people who become disabled through ill health, accident or some degenerative condition may wish to be as they were before. Yet many disabled people say the biggest issue that they have is not the impairment itself, but rather the way people respond to it.

Many people tell me that without my disability I would be free from pain and discrimination and be able to do so much more. Similarly, I have asked the female participants in disability awareness training, if they would prefer to be men so as to be spared the pain of menstruation and childbirth, and the discrimination against them as women. They tell me very clearly "No, I would not want to be a man." I ask Black people whether they would not rather be White, and not face such prejudice and discrimination. Again the answer is a clear "No". The fact of being a woman or a Black person is part of who they are. While there is an assumption that disabled people would rather not be disabled, I and other disabled people would say that the disability is part of our identity.

Yet as a disabled person who believes in Christ, I also believe that I am made in the image of God, and that I am fearfully and wonderfully made, as the Psalmist says. I do recognise that I was born with a disability, and that those who become disabled later in life may feel differently about it. However, when I was growing up, I always thought that to lose my sight would be the "worst" disability. But my friends who were blind or partially sighted would say that at least they had their mobility. So in one sense, it is all relative, and it depends on how you view yourself and others.

Yet many disabled people say the biggest issue that they have is not the impairment itself, but rather the way people respond to it.

Some people who have become disabled through illness, war or accident have told me that they are thankful that they had many years of being non-disabled. However, I have also come across some disabled people who said that their "quality of life" had improved considerably since they became disabled. This was because they had to re-evaluate their life, and explore its meaning. This in turn led to new interests, stronger relationships and a greater appreciation of who their friends really were.

### THE IMAGES CHARITIES CREATE

In the United Kingdom, the multiple sclerosis charity did a television and cinema advertising campaign in the 1980's with horrifying images of a beautiful young man and woman semi-naked, with parts of their bodies being ripped apart like paper. It showed people who thought that they were "safe" because they were young and attractive as susceptible to this form of disability. During this campaign, the group became the highest earning charity in the UK.

Fear was the message this campaign conveyed. People were terrified of becoming disabled through multiple sclerosis (MS). However, some people who had MS objected to it on the grounds that it did not accurately reflect what it is like to live with MS. In the bill-board advertisement, a message in small print said the MS charity was "A hope in hell". This continued to fuel people's perception that disability is "hell" and, indeed, "sent from hell" - something very negative that people should be afraid of.

In the past charities have played an important role in helping to portray the negative, "helpless" image of disabled people. Yet research has shown that their income will not be affected if charities show positive images of disabled people. Indeed, some charities are now showing the positive outcomes of the work disabled people do achieve with no reduction in their income!

## The realities of disability

It may appear to the reader that this article is all about the positive aspects of having a disability. But of course having a disability brings frustrations. I may be described as a hopeless romantic. I may dream of being on a beach at sunset with my wife, with the waves lapping at her feet. Yet the reality is that I would probably sink in the sand, and any romantic ideas would be forgotten as she struggled to rescue me. I would also love to go for walks in the hills or mountains with my wife, yet that is a real problem, and my disability brings restrictions. It also brings pain at times. Operations and medication may be necessary. But I have learnt to live with these aspects of having a disability, even though at times they may be scary or painful. And I have never felt the need or desire to be not disabled. Maybe it is because I don't know what it would be like, because the "benefits" of not being disabled seem unreal. Or because I feel all the pain, the operations, the discrimination, etc. these have played a part in shaping me into the person I have become: hopefully, not some bitter, twisted individual, but a person who feels great strength, and has a broad outlook on life.

I'm not saying that a non-disabled person may not have these same characteristics. I simply feel that for me, these are some of the things that have shaped me into the person I am. Having a disability has brought new opportunities.

## What are the positive aspects of having a disability?

Rather than seeing disability as something purely negative, it does in fact have some positive aspects. These can be both internal, like the effects on my character mentioned above, and

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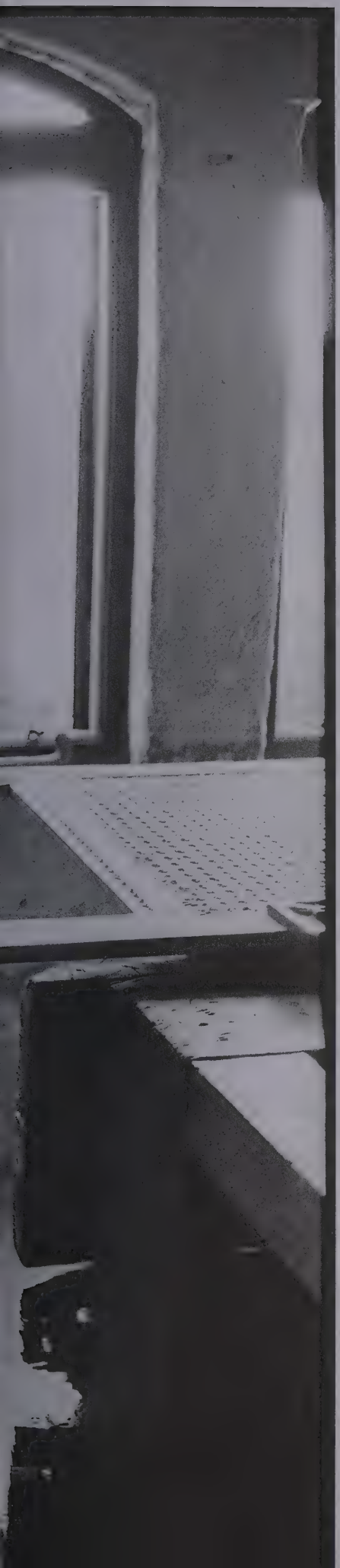

external, such as the fact that the society I live in has made some compensatory decisions to help me live with my disability. These may be seen as simply granting the "rights" of disabled people, yet I know that within certain cultures, these "rights" don't exist.

Many disabled people have had to learn to be patient. When you need to wait for someone to assist you across the road, up some stairs, to be dressed or to be fed, one of the things you learn is to be patient. As frustrating as this can be at times, it begins to become part of your character. There are other characteristics that you can acquire, such as discovering who your friends really are, learning to ask for help, discovering new ways to do things, pushing back your own or others' boundaries, listening to other people, valuing others that society may choose to ignore or devalue, acquiring a new skill, feeling or attitude.

There are also the external advantages. Disabled people can display a permit on their cars that allows them to park in restricted areas for a limited period. They are entitled to free parking in most car parks. They receive financial allowances from the government that recognises that they must bear extra costs.

## Disability "rights"

Freedom of choice is something unknown for many disabled people. They are often restricted not by their disability but through the boundaries other people put upon them. For example, in job interviews, employers often ask discriminating questions and make discriminating assumptions. Yet in most cases this is done out of ignorance rather than deliberately. Hopefully, we are aware that it is not appropriate to be prejudicial towards women and people from different cultures or races, and most countries have laws that prevent such behaviour. But for disabled people there is no such protection. The need for anti-discrimination laws is vital in all countries.

Whilst charities have played an important role in campaigning and providing services to disabled people, the UK government continues to deny its responsibility and allows charities to provide the services that it, as the government, should be providing to disabled people as a "right". Disabled people represent 14% of the UK population, and a time is approaching when they will become a strong political voice, and use that voice to bring change.

It is also important that our societies accept disabled people for who they are. Disabled people can make a valuable contribution, based on the experiences gained as a result of their disability. For example, some schools welcome children with Down's Syndrome for their easy-going and loving personalities. This is just one example of a characteristic that disabled people can offer society.

## How can the church respond?

The church's response is both inside and outside its own house; it can play an important part in changing society's response to disabled people. We can proclaim the need to value all God's people, and to recognise that all people should be treated equally.

If we know that *all people* are created equal in the sight of God, and that *all* have access to God through Jesus Christ, then the church has a responsibility to ensure that its doors are not closed to the gifts and needs of disabled people. Sadly, as the chairman of Church Action on Disability (CHAD), I have come across many areas where the church has not shown Christ's love and acceptance of disabled people. The need to value the whole body, and see the part that disabled people play in enabling the body of Christ to function fully, is as yet not happening. But as we begin to see the positive rather than the negative side of disability, hopefully we will see attitudes changing. •

*Rev John Naudé, from the UK, is Chairperson of Church Action on Disability (CHAD).*

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# LIFE BEYOND THE BARREL OF A GUN

BY HEATHER LITTLE-WHITE

*Tuesday July 6, 1999, 9.00 p.m. I came face to face with two gunmen and, for a moment, I saw death. This happened in the normal course of life. On my way home from work, I decided to pass by a friend to drop off Daily Word reading to help her through the troubling time she was having with her father's illness.*

*Since my friend resides just a stone's throw from the prime minister's residence in Kingston, Jamaica, I had never felt any danger visiting her in this upscale neighbourhood on other occasions. That night was no different, I felt no danger. But danger lurked in the dark. My mobile phone rang just as I was about to turn into my friend's driveway. I stopped by her gate to answer the call that came from the company responsible for managing security at my office.*

*As I finished the call and placed the phone in its cradle, I turned my head to face the barrel of a gun carried by a man at the driver's door of my white Toyota Corolla car. For a moment, I felt a rush of blood to my face, my heart accelerated. I couldn't believe that I was being held up. I looked to my left to see another man also pointing a gun at me by the front passenger's door.*

*The attacker at my right attempted to open my car door. Luckily, my doors were locked by a central locking system. Through my car window that was turned up, I could read his lips ordering me out of the car and shouting "Police! Police!".*

*For an instant, I felt afraid when I looked at the guns aimed at me. I took a deep breath and recalled my Truth principles and resorted to my constant affirmation that "all is in Divine Order". It became obvious that my attackers could not be policemen as they were short, well below the 5ft 6-inch requirement for entering the police force. They appeared vicious and ready to pull the trigger. A still small voice told me not to come out of a locked car into the unknown.*

*In a flash, I saw a group of people sitting on my friend's patio and in another flash, the still small voice told me to drive into the driveway and toot my horn for attention. I pressed the gas pedal, and sped into the yard. I heard a loud explosion, then there was a burning in my right shoulder. My legs went dead like a deflated balloon. I heard another shot, flat and faint, in a distance.*

*Realising I was shot, I affirmed my faith in the Divine, by uttering: "Father, I cannot die, I still have your work to do". I stayed conscious and the persons who were gathered on my friend's patio, and were part of a Bible study group, took charge and took me to the hospital quickly. Days later, I learned that I was paralysed from the chest down. I was thankful, however, because I still had life, accepting my fate knowing that while I have life, though living with a bullet in my spine, anything is possible.*

As a "living statistic" of gun crime, it is living with a disability that has brought new meaning to my life. There is a tendency for persons with disabilities to become angry and ask, "Why me, Lord?". But in the process of mental and physical rehabilitation and spiritual fortification, it becomes necessary to say, "Use me, Lord". Naturally, this requires a level of spiritual mastery and a recognition that disability should

**On the pathway to spiritual maturity, one important prescription is not becoming angry**

*The effects of many years of civil war will be felt long after the fighting stops, as thousands of mines have been laid all over the country and only a few of the mine fields are known. Here a mine victim chats with friends in Luena, Moxico Province, a town in Eastern Angola.*

not prohibit disabled persons from maximising their full potential.

My own experience has demonstrated that accepting one's disability and living life positively is an inspiring and motivating force for the able and my disabled colleagues. Of course, the church has a critical role to play in bringing disabled persons to a level of self-mastery.

On the pathway to spiritual maturity, one important prescription is not becoming angry. In my own process of forgiving my attackers I regularly ask, "Father, forgive them as they know not what they do", understanding, instead, their own psycho-social framework as men at risk in a society that offers little hope except through drugs, violence and crime. The negative energy of anger should be used positively to contribute to the development of marginalised persons in society. One of my daily affirmations is

*Today I am at peace with myself, in harmony with all people, places and things, for I recognise myself* ***as one*** *with God, the Living Spirit Almighty.*

Another useful way to help the disabled toward self-fulfillment is to find time to devote to disability issues and to help our disabled brothers and sisters, especially those with limited resources, to keep hope alive and take charge of their destiny. The need is great as they grapple with low self-esteem, sexual uncertainties, discrimination in the workplace and by society in general, limited access to buildings and public transportation and a range of social and personal issues.

Like many of us, Errington has come to a place where thankfulness for life provides the strength to get out of bed each day and the motivation to be of assistance to our colleagues.

Part of my inspiration comes from a young man, Errington Pellingion who, three years ago, at eighteen, was shot by the police while peddling his wares in downtown Kingston. As a paraplegic, his indomitable spirit has motivated him to form the Paraplegic Development and Outreach Foundation (PARADOF). Its aim is to alleviate the conditions of all paraplegics by providing the means for them to become independent and useful members of society. As an advisor for that organisation, I am moved by Errington's ability to mobilise resources for paraplegics by providing food, houses, computers, sewing machines, repairing and purchasing wheelchairs offering skills training. The organisation's motto, is the "Serenity Prayer":

***God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change***
***The courage to change the things I can***
***And the wisdom to know the difference.***

Like many of us, Errington has come to a place where thankfulness for life provides the strength to get out of bed each day and the motivation to be of assistance to our colleagues.

Unity is strength and disabled persons with similar needs must work together for their common good, especially in societies where there is little recognition for persons with disabilities. To help them achieve this objective, they should receive love, encouragement and support to release the fears that may hold them back from their own self-empowerment.

Persons with disabilities must constantly recognise that their bodies are temples of spiritual awareness, regardless of physical shape or form. This awareness should be used for life, peace, prosperity, success and constant renewal. When you look down the barrel of a gun and come away alive, what more can there be but to be thankful. I keep hope alive in the words of William A. Ward:

**Because of Your power, Father I am alive**
**Because of Your love, I am immortal**
**Because of Your mercy, I am grateful**
**Because of Your guidance, I am wise**
**Because of Your creation, I am wealthy**
**Because of Your touch, I am whole**
**Because of Your presence, I am joyful**
**Because of Your peace, I am serene**
**Because of Your faith, I am free**
**Because of You, I am**
**Thank you, Father**

*Heather Little White, Ph.D. is chief executive officer of her Food and Nutrition business in Jamaica. A nutritionist, she also lectures at one of the universities and is a free-lance writer of Jamaica's leading newspaper. She is a motivational speaker and an advocate for support for persons with disabilities in Jamaica.*

# BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING

**BY SENATOR FLOYD MORRIS**

The experiences cited in this article, highlight a long and hard struggle for social empowerment in a highly unfriendly disabled society. The experiences are not unique to me, but rather, reflect the struggles, discrimination, victimisation and resentment met by these individuals, upon climbing the ladder of upward mobility. The ability to succeed is determined by a willingness of the individual to adopt a tenacious and persevering approach to life. This has been my approach to confront the challenges of the society and break the glass ceiling.

Life around the world is not an easy endeavour for the disabled, especially in developing countries. The upward mobility climb is often met with scorn, resentment, discrimination and victimisation. The trend in Jamaica is no different. In this article, I will highlight some of the difficulties and challenges individuals with a disability, have to encounter in Jamaican society whilst on upward mobility path.

It is often said that the way a society treats its elderly and disabled is an indication of its level of development and civilisation. All societies should aspire to have mechanisms to take care of these vulnerable groups. In Jamaica, they are being put in place but we have a significant way still to go.

All societies should facilitate the smooth rehabilitation and development of the talents of persons with a disability. No one with a disability should be made to struggle for assistance or rehabilitation. Wherever possible, the state and members of civil society should try to facilitate the smooth and orderly transformation of these persons' lives.

I developed glaucoma at the tender age of 14, in 1993, and got totally blind at age 20. When I became blind, I decided to look at my life and see where I could go from there. I decided I needed to develop a strategy that would assist me to overcome the particular milieu I was in. At the base of this plan was

getting a solid education. This turned out to be an Herculean, but not insurmountable task. There was no money, no father, and my mother had to care for eight children. I decided to start a small chicken business to help generate sufficient funds to go to school and get this education.

At the outset, both family and community members were skeptical of my ability to raise these chickens and to get the education that I dreamt about. But I managed to raise those chickens and generate sufficient funds to aid my schooling.

The next step was to move to an environment that was conducive to getting the education I wanted. A radio broadcaster to whom I am eternally grateful, Doraine Sammuels of RJR, advised me to come to the metropolitan area of Kingston which I did in 1991.

At first I stayed in Vineyard Town with my elder brother, Ralston, who gave me tremendous support during this trying time. The Jamaica Society for the Blind (JSB) offered rehabilitation support, and it was there that I learnt to read and write Braille. Simultaneously, I started evening classes in order to matriculate for the University of the West Indies.

One of the popular and affluent schools up-town blatantly refused to accept me in their programme, claiming that I was blind and therefore would not be able to keep pace with their students. But Mico Evening College accepted me and I sat seven subjects over a two-year period; two A'levels and five O'levels.

Two years living on that treacherous Marescaux Road had finally paid off. There were times when I tumbled into potholes, bumped into JPSCo's light poles and wires, and even fell into the uncovered manholes that exist all over the streets of Kingston. However, such is life. My grandfather always told me, "If you want good, your nose have to run".

In 1993, I was accepted to the University of the West Indies (UWI) to read for the Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass Communication. This was a dream come true, as I wanted to become a radio broadcaster.

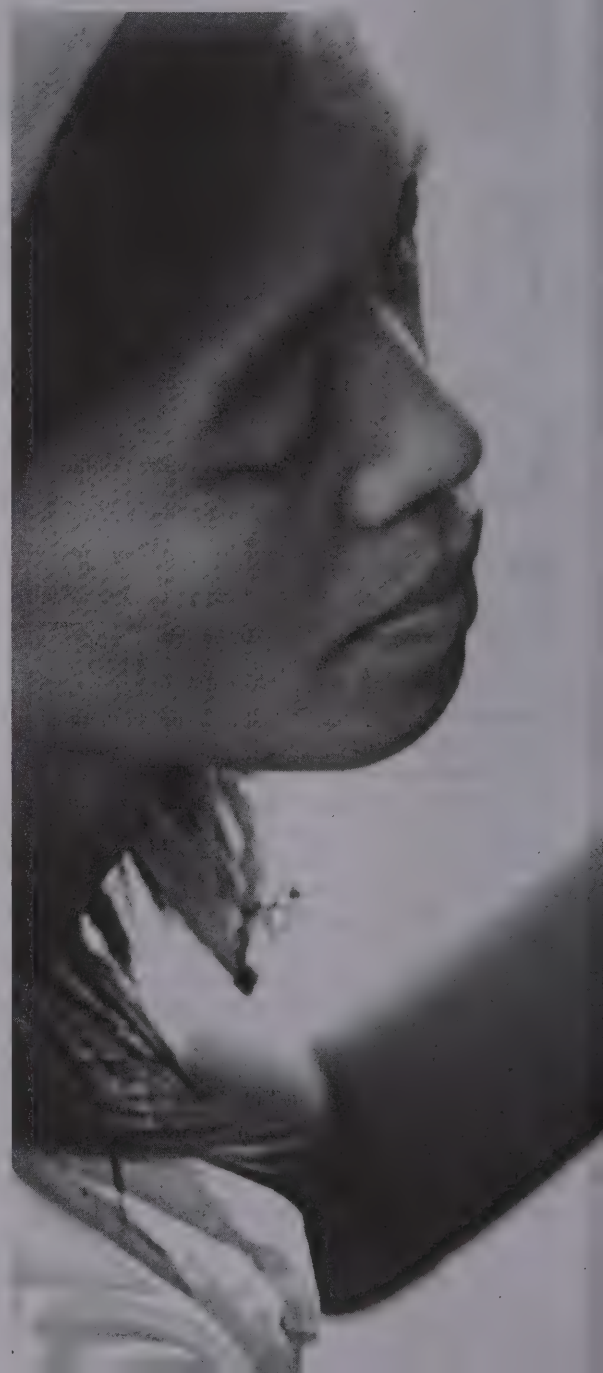
But my dream was threatened by the perennial problem of lack of financial resources. The Students Loan Bureau, to which I am currently repaying a loan, and a family friend who contributed $10,000, allowed me to grasp this opportunity of a university education. I decided to make the best use of this opportunity. It was an investment in my future and so I could not afford to fail.

I spent three wonderful years at UWI. Christine Cummings, Michael Witter, Aggrey Brown, Rupert Lewis, Marlene Hamilton, Peter O'Sullivan, Faye Ellington and many others, contributed significantly to my successful tenure at this illustrious institution.

I graduated with Honours in 1996, started the Master of Philosophy in Government degree at the same institution, studying the effects of the multilateral institutions on the political process in Jamaica. This programme was successfully completed in January of this year.

Whilst at UWI, I was involved in several student activities including student politics. I became the first person with a disability to be elected to the Students' Guild. I was elected after a hard-fought campaign in which I had to prove that I was just as competent and capable as my sighted opponents.

During the election debate, members of the campaign team decided to turn off the light just as I made the following statement, "all of us here have a disability. It's just that some are more obvious than others. If I should turn off the light tonight, how many of you will be able to function? I would be able to because as a blind person, I can function under any circumstances, whether be it in darkness or in light." For over 15 minutes, the entire auditorium applauded the presentation. The next day I was successfully elected as deputy hall chairman for Taylor Hall.



The years spent at university undoubtedly prepared me for things to come. The big break came in 1998, when for the first time in Jamaica, a blind person was appointed to parliament. The prime minister, the Hon. P.J. Patterson, was responsible for this.

My appointment came within the context of my involvement with the People's National Party (PNP) Youth Organisation and the role that I played in the 1997 General Elections. I travelled the length and breadth of the country: from Morant Point to Negril Point and Clarendon to St. Mary, bringing PNP's message to the people of Jamaica.

For this effort, the prime minister and president of the PNP decided to appoint me to the Senate. The appointment also came within the context of a genuine attempt on the part of the prime minister to broaden the levels of participation by the various social groups within the highest decision-making institution of the country. The appointment was well received by a wide cross section of the Jamaican population, even though there were those who thought this historic act was one of tokenism.

The appointment to the Senate has given me the opportunity to speak on any issue relating to the Jamaican society although my advocacy has been confined to youth and the disabled. These are two groups that are amongst the most vulnerable within the society.•

*Senator Floyd Morris is the first blind person appointed to the upper house in the Jamaican Parliament. A Master Degree graduate of the University of the West Indies, he has been instrumental in promoting a national policy on disability and contributes much of this time to motivational speaking in the nation's schools.*

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# Introducing the EDAN Network

During the 8th Assembly of the WCC at Harare, Zimbabwe in December 1998, a number of persons participated as advisors on disability concerns. This was the springboard for the establishment of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN), a project of the WCC – Justice, Peace and Creation Team's work on Persons with Disabilities.

The primary objective of the Network is to support the work of individuals, churches and church organisations concerned with the issues affecting disabled people globally.

Its task is to support the work of individuals, churches and non-church organisations concerned with issues affecting disabled people globally and to advocate for a just and inclusive community by creating a network of people with disabilities as a distinctive ecumenical contribution to new models of being a church.

Members of the network have also engaged in theological reflection on disability in order to provide a foundation for church engagement so as to advise WCC on how to improve conditions affecting disabled people in the churches globally. A major issue for further discussion with churches, national ecumenical bodies and regional ecumenical organisations in respect to inclusion and full participation of people with disabilities in their ministries.

The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), which was already running a fully-fledged desk for persons with handicaps, was chosen to offer a home for a coordinating office. EDAN is presently administered by a part-time consultant under WCC auspices. The consultant, Rev. Samuel Kabue, is also director of the NCCK Advocacy Unit.

EDAN has two dimensions: as a movement and as an institution. As a movement it will continue to develop regional networks to lobby for the cooperation of persons with disabilities in the general life of the church. At the institutional level, EDAN will be part of the WCC structure within the Justice, Peace and Creation (JPC) Team.

A three-member core group – Rev. Kathy Reeves (USA), Rev. Arne Fritzon (Sweden) and Rev. Dr. Gordon Cowans (Jamaica) – supports and assists the consultant.

EDAN publishes a quarterly newsletter available from:

EDAN, PO Box 45009, Nairobi, Kenya, Tel: +254-2-222 699, Fax: +254-2-215 169, Email: edan@net2000ke.com.

*Living with a developmental disability is hard sometimes because people don't understand what developmental disability is and they treat us differently. People notice our disability, and miss our many abilities! Developmental disability used to be called mental retardation. We don't like that. It has been used to hurt our feelings.*

*When people think of us as disabled, they sometimes think we cannot learn at all. Those people have teased us and ridiculed us because they didn't know how much we could accomplish. Having our disability means that sometimes we need help with bigger decisions or understanding complicated words or papers. Sometimes we need things explained differently. It helps when simpler words are used. Some of us live at home with our family, some of us live in group homes and some of us live in our own apartments. We have jobs, earn our paychecks, take buses, ride in cabs and even drive our own cars. We can do a lot.*

*It is important that people learn more about our disability. They will find out how they can better help us, and more importantly they will realise that we can be helpful to them!*

# THE CURRENT EDAN PROCESS ON THE THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

In 1997, the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Central Committee received the first interim theological and ecclesiological statement on persons with disabilities. The purpose of this statement, prepared by a theologian with a disability with the staff of Faith and Order, was to help churches talk about the issue of persons with disabilities in church and society.

The statement highlighted the empirical framework, definitions and theological understanding of the issue of persons with disabilities. WCC member churches and Christians throughout the world were challenged to understand the importance of this issue and to make appropriate response. To date very few have responded. Four years down the road, the Ecumenical Disabilities Advocacy Network (EDAN), Faith and Order and Education and Ecumenical Formation teams, and representatives of the working group in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have found it necessary to issue an updated statement to reflect new concerns in this area and to provoke churches, world communions and ecumenical organisations to look at disabilities through the eyes of those affected and give them space to participate, express themselves and contribute their special gifts to the new model of being church.

A first meeting in Geneva from 6-11 August 2000, decided to identify 12 drafters to begin the process. The process will then be widened to collect more views during a 2002 Bossey seminar attended by theologians, disability advocates and others involved in disability work. The Faith and Order, Justice Peace and Creation and Education and Ecumenical Formation teams and LWF will be represented. A "Padare" on disabilities is scheduled for the 2002 WCC Central Committee meeting. The process will culminate in 2003 at a special plenary session to present the interim statement to the WCC Central Committee for adoption.

The drafting process will in all likelihood address the following concerns:

- Discrimination and what the Bible says about it and our faith;
- What resources persons with disabilities can bring to the church to enrich it;
- Cultural beliefs that disabilities are a result of sin;
- Genetic engineering and its relation with disability concerns;
- Curricula of theological colleges and universities.

*EDAN Network members during the launch in Nairobi: from left to right - **Sitting**: Razaka Manantenasoa(Madagascar), Simone Poortman (Netherlands), Sarah Babirye (Uganda), Samuel Kabue (Kenya), Kathy Reeves (USA) - **Standing**: Rev. Abraham Berinyuu (Ghana), Setri Nyomi* (AACC), Arne Fritzson (Sweden), William Temu* (WCC-Staff), Rev. Jesse Kamau* (moderator Presbyterian Church of East Africa), Gordon Cowans (Jamaica), Te Ja Hee (Korea), Ting Bo Joseph Isai (Taiwan), Dr. Agnes Abuom* (WCC Africa President), Pal Gado (Hungary)*

** not network members*

SISTERS

**This section is dedicated to news from the SISTERS network *(Sisters in the Struggle to Eliminate Racism and Sexism)*. This network enables women to link up and exchange their experiences, generating solidarity, supporting one another through concrete actions. Its members come from churches as well as from groups and movements in civil society committed to eliminate racism and sexism.**

# Deconstructing Racism in Sex Trafficking and the Global Sex Trade

**By Maitet Ledesma**

## Introduction

The rise of racist and fascist ideologies in Europe has been historically linked to periods of economic recession and rising unemployment. During these periods, various European governments enacted immigration policies which only aggravated further the social and political marginalisation of migrant communities and institutionalised their discrimination. Among some of these were the removal of British citizenship from people without ancestral connections to Britain in 1981; in France in 1977, the introduction of a voluntary repatriation scheme and, in 1986, the introduction of a measure which removed basic rights of due process to migrants facing deportation.

In Germany in 1980, the first visa restrictions were imposed to prevent further arrivals of asylum-seekers. Spain meanwhile, has fortified its frontiers with North Africa with barbed wire, closed-circuit TV monitoring and a marine guard to patrol all of the country's 240-plus harbours. It has also entered bilateral agreements with France to control the illegal entry of Turks and Africans. These policies have summarily taken away the rights of non-EC migrant peoples, thus establishing their status as second-class citizens who do not have equal rights with nationals. As a result, they have become even more vulnerable to acts of racism and discrimination, many of which are violent.

Meanwhile, back in the countries of origin, the social, economic and political conditions breeding the out-migration of peoples especially from poor and developing countries churns out a constant oversupply of cheap raw materials, skilled and semi-skilled unemployed workers, and poor women and children who are left to look for ways and means of augmenting the incomes of their families. The ravaging effects of economic globalisation schemes under such euphemisms as tourism development, surplus labour export, alternative employment, the hospitality and entertainment industry, have taken a destructive toll on the lives of poor people, especially among the most vulnerable – the women and children.

## Marketing Exoticism and Docility

Today, images of the Philippines being brought to our living rooms in Europe depict a country reeling from overwhelming poverty, with over 70% of the population living below the poverty threshold. The number of unemployed and underemployed Filipinos has reached 10.07 million. The country is unable to cope with the ravages wrought by one natural calamity after another as a result of massive environmental destruction; its wealth and natural resources have been plundered by foreign multinational corpora-

tions, greedy local businessmen and corrupt government officials – leaving the land and the people bleeding and dying.

At the same time, the stereotypes of Filipina women in Europe are images of quiet, docile and submissive women who easily blend into the background of wallpapers and rugs as they clean houses or make up hotel beds. Images of beautiful young women walking arm-in-arm with their big-bellied and balding husbands. Images of articulate, well-educated and intelligent young women who have become surrogate mothers in European homes, working in low-paid, unskilled and menial jobs not commensurate to their level of experience, education and skill.

Philippine research statistics confirm that six to eight out of every ten Filipino overseas workers are women. The first most likely job for a Filipina going abroad is as a domestic worker. The second is in the sex trade, selling women for sex on over 200, 000 websites, via sex phone calls, to escort services. The trade also sells "exotic and docile" Filipinas into marriage from catalogues with numbered mug-shots, presenting them as the old-fashioned and perfect homemakers who will cater to their husbands' every whim and fancy. It engages in sex trafficking which involves the systematic and organised transport of women and children for the purpose of sex for profit. In most cases, it uses force, violence, harassment and deceit to entice women and children to enter the sex trade.

Not surprisingly, therefore, total strangers have accosted Filipinas on the streets with questions like, 'How much did your husband pay for you?' When Filipinas attend social gatherings and meet people for the first time, they are immediately asked if they are domestic helpers or if they are married to a European. Many are being asked to facilitate introductions to other Filipinas interested in finding Caucasian partners or husbands.

Whether engaged in domestic work or in the sex trade, these women have become the principal breadwinners whose major responsibility it is to ensure the economic survival of their families back home.

# The structural Racism of Economic Globalisation schemes

According to the research by the Women's Education Development Productivity Research Organisation (WEDPRO), the victims of sex trafficking are usually women and children from poor families in rural and urban areas, with little or no education and with limited skills and knowledge. Ninety percent of the victims of the global sex trade come from poor countries like the Philippines. Why poor women and children? And why are the majority of them coming from third-world Countries like the Philippines?

While European media have effectively stereotyped Filipinos as domestic workers, "mail-order brides", prostitutes and entertainers, it has stopped short of exposing the root causes of these problems. There has never been any serious effort to educate Western societies in understanding the global and structural framework of the problem. Neither has there been any effort to expose and link the role and impact of economic globalisation schemes in laying down the foundations for the economic and sexual exploitation of women and children.

In the globalising scheme of things, third-world countries and their peoples are relegated to the role of providing for the basic needs of industrialised countries in the West in their march towards unprecedented technological advancement and industrial progress as a source of cheap raw materials, a limitless supply of a cheap and docile labour force for service and to provide for the recreation needs of its population, and a market for its expensive finished industrial products.

Economic policies which principally cater to the interests of multinational corporations and which kill local business that can never "freely" compete with the limitless capital and advanced technology of highly industrialised countries; terminally corrupt government officials who wantonly steal from the national coffers and sell the patrimony and sovereignty of the country through such treacherous policies as the Visiting Forces Agreement (which allows the use of over 20 ports all over the Philippines for the rest and recreation needs of visiting military forces) – these have left the country essentially agricultural, non-industrialising, backward and underdeveloped.

These economic policies are among the many conditionalities imposed by international financing institutions like the IMF-WB, GATT / WTO on debtor countries from the third-world like the Philippines. Likewise, they offer the following solutions to the spiraling economic crisis in these countries:

- **Tourism Development** = Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, is earning US$ 8 billion a year from tourism. Eighty percent of the tourists are male.
- **Surplus Labour Export** = increasing the number of Filipinas leaving the country. In 1997 alone, the number has reached a total of 375,000.
- **Alternative Employment** = Filipinas working as prostitutes in the vicinity of American military bases in the United States.
- **The Hospitality and Entertainment Industry** = 600,000 prostituted women in the Philippines. Of this figure, 100,000 are children.

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# Stop sex trafficking! An urgent global concern

The tyranny and oppression inflicted by sex trafficking upon society in general, and women and children in particular, warrants our most urgent attention. According to the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), it is a multi-billion dollar industry, earning as much as US$ 17 billion a year for sex traffickers, pimps, sex tour operators, bar and club proprietors, corrupt law enforcers and government officials. Even government agencies in both sending and receiving countries earn income through tariffs and taxes levied on this industry. The sex trade sells Filipino women for US$3,000-5,000 in the international sex market.

And the problem is escalating, not only in the Philippines but in many other third-world countries. Japan for example, is considered Asia's largest sex market with an estimated 150,000 entertainers and commercial sex workers coming not only from the Philippines but also from Thailand, Korea and other neighbouring poor Asian countries. Bangladesh, with 400 Bangladeshi women being trafficked into

Pakistan every month. Or at least a dozen international criminal syndicates operating in Australia which annually traffick around 300 Thai women into the country for prostitution.

Sex trafficking is as vicious as ever in its pursuit of profit from the commodification and selling of women's bodies, bought and sold within the global market economy. In the process, it perpetuates and legitimises the continued subjugation, oppression and exploitation of women from a certain class, especially women of a particular race, colour, and economic need.

The problem of sex trafficking is global, and very personal in its impact on all our lives. It is life threatening, it has far-reaching implications to our well-being, the well-being of our families, relatives and friends, and it compromises the very future of the next generations. When confronted with such a situation, it is no longer safe or convenient for us to remain paralysed by our anger or by the magnitude of the problem. Rather, let us use the passion of our anger to confront the problem with courage and conviction.

***The Purple Rose Campaign***

The Purple Rose Campaign, launched in 1999 by GABRIELA-Philippines, a national alliance of over 250 women's organisations, programmes, desks and institutions, is an avenue to creatively and positively express the Filipino people's moral outrage against the escalating problem of sex trafficking of Filipino women and children. The campaign is going on in Belgium, Canada, Germany, Hongkong, Italy, Luxembourg, the Philippines, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States.

The Purple Rose Campaign is an organised and global effort to bring together individuals and organisations in the Philippines and in other countries to work together in opposing and protesting the intensifying global sex trade in general, and the sex trafficking of Filipino women and children in particular. It provides all of us with the possibility to regain our lost self-esteem and to create a new image of ourselves, as women, as a people, as human beings; to be known for our spirit of resistance against all forms of injustice and exploitation and for our courage and daring in taking a stand for that which is empowering and genuinely liberating to women and to society.

Join the Purple Rose Campaign! Wear the purple rose pin as a sign of your resistance and protest against sex trafficking. Sign the pledge card as a sign of your commitment to support the campaign. Popularise the campaign in your communities. Organise groups in your local areas to discuss the issue, how it affects your community and how you can support and participate in the campaign.

## EVERYONE HAS A CONTRIBUTION TO MAKE. EVERYONE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

European Purple Rose Campaign
Postbus 15687
1001 ND Amsterdam
The Netherlands
E-mail: *pinaysaholland@zonnet.nl*
Tel: (020) 616.5288
Fax: (020) 689.8857

*Maitet Ledesma is Coordinator of the European Purple Rose Campaign and a member of the SISTERS network (Sisters in the Struggle to Eliminate Racism and Sexism)*

# WCC PUBLICATIONS

## OF ROLLING WATERS AND ROARING WINDS, *A celebration of the woman song*

***Lynda Katsuno and Edna Orteza, eds***

An enduring legacy of the Ecumenical Decade – Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) is the rich treasury of new liturgical, spiritual and artistic resources which it has generated. Through prayers, meditations, poems and reflections, women around the world, living in different social and cultural contexts and drawing on diverse church traditions, have shared their longing for a new community in Christ. They have spoken of their sorrow and pain – "these wounds have driven me to write down my thoughts on all things," says a 14-year-old Bosnian refugee in one of the contributions to this book – but have also celebrated their joys and hopes. This new collection of these creative expressions, largely taken from Decade-related events and publications, is an ideal resource for individual meditation, group reflection and the preparation of ecumenical worship services. Included are a series of meditations for Holy Week and some twenty songs of prayer and praise.

*Available from WCC Publications for Sfr. 25.00, US$ 16.50, £9.95. ISBN 2-8254-1287-2.*

## FINDING A VOICE, *Communicating the Ecumenical Movement, with an introduction by John Bluck*

***Marlin VanElderen***

The unexpected and untimely death of Marlin VanElderen on Pentecost Monday of 2000 has provoked a flood of messages of sympathy from all parts of the worldwide ecumenical community. For nearly twenty years he had been on the staff of the World Council of Churches. When he first came to the WCC he was already an accomplished editor with Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. in Grand Rapids, USA.

For more than half of the twenty years' existence of the prize-winning WCC magazine *One World*, Marlin VanElderen served as its editor. Particularly through his thought-provoking and incisive editorials he succeeded in making *One World* a widely appreciated source of information and reflection about the ecumenical movement.

This book is a selection of these editorials. Timely, rooted in biblical faith, they tell and interpret the story of the complexity of unity in the widest sense of the word.

*Available from WCC Publications for approx. Sfr. 13.50, US$ 8.95, £5.70. ISBN 2-8254-1335-6, Risk Book Series co-published with Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, USA.*

## FACING AIDS – *The Challenge, the Churche's Response*

***by Theo Tschuy***

This WCC study document is the fruit of two years of intensive consultation by an international group of pastors, theologians and ethicists, scientists, doctors and nurses, persons living with AIDS and persons working with those touched by it. Successive chapters focus on the scientifics facts and social, economic and cultural context; theological perspectives; ethical and medical-ethical issues; human rights and responsibilities; and pastoral care by the church as healing community.

*Available from WCC Publications, 2nd printing, Sfr.15.00, US$9.95, £6.50, ISBN 2-8254-1213-9.*

# PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

## DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE 1999:1-2 *(published in cooperation with RAFI)*

*The ETC Century. Erosion, Technological Transformation and Corporate Concentration in the 21st Century,* ***by Pat Roy Mooney.***

*Development Dialogue* is intended to provide a free forum for critical discussion of development priorities and problems facing the 21st century, international development cooperation in general and multilateralism in particular.

*Development Dialogue* is addressed to politicians

# PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

and administrators in both third world and industrialised countries, to officials in international organisations, and to members of civil society organisations as well as to representatives of the media and the research community.

*Development Dialogue* is published by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in two issues per year. *Copies may be obtained from the Dag Hammarskjöld Centre, Övre Slottsgatan 2, SE-753 10 Uppsala, Sweden, Fax: +46-18-122 072*

*email: secretariat@dhf.uu.se*

## THE PERSISTENCE AND MUTATION OF RACISM

*The International Council on Human Rights Policy*

In one form or another racism is to be found in every society on earth. It is associated with certain forms of entrenched poverty and certain kinds of extreme violence. It is a denial of human relationship. Yet, for many people it remains almost invisible, unnoticed except when violence is involved. Those who do not experience it often fail to understand how profoundly offensive it is. As preparations are made for the United Nations World Conference on Racism and Xenophobia in 2001, this short report surveys some of the main issues that preoccupy people who suffer from racism or who study its effects.

*This document is published in English, Spanish and French and can be ordered from* ***The International Council on Human Rights Policy****, PO Box 147, 1290 Versoix, Switzerland, Tel: +41-22-775 3300, Fax: +41-22-775 3303, Email: ichrp@international-council.org, Web: http://www.international-council.org. ISBN 2-940259-09-7, 15.- Swiss francs (+3.- p&p)*

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You can read articles from *Inside Out* on CWM's website at *www.cwmission.org.uk* The website also contains loads of free resources, church information and a free news service. Its a goldmine of information on CWM and the world Church.

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